

**RE-ANIMATED:
THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
HORROR FILM REMAKE, 2003-2013**

Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis is a study of American horror remakes produced in the years 2003-2013, and it represents a significant academic intervention into an understanding of the horror remaking trend. It addresses the remaking process as one of adaptation, examines the remakes as texts in their own right, and situates them within key cultural, industry and reception contexts. It also shows how remakes have contributed to the horror genre's evolution over the last decade, despite their frequent denigration by critics and scholars.

Chapter One introduces the topic, and sets out the context, scope and approach of the work. Chapter Two reviews the key literature which informs this study, considering studies in adaptation, remaking, horror remakes specifically, and the genre more broadly. Chapter Three explores broad theoretical questions surrounding the remake's position in a wider culture of cinematic recycling and repetition, and issues of fidelity and taxonomy. Chapter Four examines the 'reboots' of one key production company, exploring how changes are made across versions even as promotion relies on nostalgic connections with the originals. Chapter Five discusses a diverse range of slasher film remakes to show how they represent variety and contribute to genre development. Chapter Six considers socio-political themes in 1970s horror films and their contemporary post-9/11 remakes, and Chapter Seven focuses on gender representation and recent genre trends in the rape-revenge remake.

This thesis concludes with a discussion of the most recent horror remakes, and reiterates the findings from the preceding chapters. Ultimately, genre remakes remain prevalent because they are often profitable and cater for a guaranteed audience. They are commercial products, but also represent some of the more creative entries in horror cinema over the last decade, and their success enables further productions. Rather than being understood as simplistic derivative copies, horror remakes should be considered as intertextual adaptations which both draw from and help to shape the genre.

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Parts of Chapter 7 have been previously published as 'The re-rape and revenge of Jennifer Hills: Gender and genre in *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010)' in *Horror Studies* 4:1, pp.75-89, April 2013. Small parts of Chapter 8 are adapted from a film review, 'Evil Dead', which originally appeared on the website *Infinite Earths*, May 23 2013, available at: <http://79.170.40.240/infiniteearth.co.uk/?p=476>, and a blog post '*I Spit on Your Grave* 2: "Why bother?"', which originally appeared on the website *In Motion*, May 8 2013, available at: <http://cathpostgrad.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/i-spit-on-your-grave-2-why-bother/>. All three pieces are reproduced in their entirety and in original formats in Appendix II.

A note on referencing: I have referred to the website boxofficemojo.com for box office figures. Within the text in the chapters which follow, I have provided only the website name instead of a full URL reference, for brevity and presentation purposes, and with an understanding that the respective page is easily found on such databases. Full references for each use are, however, provided in the bibliography.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The mainstream is swallowing its tail to the point where the finite number of remakable films will run out and they'll resort [...] to remaking remakes. (Newman 2009)

To complain about a certain quality of sameness in American movies is to wilfully misunderstand many of the basic facts about why they are made. (Baron 2012)

The last decade has seen an increasing number of horror film remakes produced in America, new versions of both domestic and foreign texts released cinematically and directly to home video formats. While the tendency for Hollywood to recycle past films is certainly no new phenomenon, the continuing trend for remaking genre cinema is now so pervasive that it has seemingly become, for fans and critics alike, a tiresome exercise in reproducing and rebranding cherished films in order to make money at the box office while negating the memory or status of those originals.

In this study, I consider the recent raft of horror remakes within their own contexts. While some academic work on the subject has progressed understandings of both the text and the process, too often studies of the horror remake specifically have focused on arbitrary differences between 'original' and 'copy', echoing unproductive work on adaptation which concentrates on hierarchical notions of fidelity, and fails to offer insight into the reasons for a remake's production and how it adapts a text, its potential resonance with audiences, and its contribution to the evolution of the genre with which it is aligned. While it is essential to acknowledge that any new version of a story cannot (and, perhaps, should not) be studied in isolation from its source, it is far more productive and illuminating to consider remakes from a comparative perspective (that is, their relationship to their source), and in relation to their place and purpose within the contemporary horror genre.

This doctoral thesis represents the first serious intervention into an academic understanding of the contemporary horror film remake as a significant trend in American genre cinema of the 2000s and 2010s to date. It considers remaking as an adaptive process as well as looking at remakes themselves as texts, and places the films within their own industry and reception contexts. Remakes are discussed in relation to their original films and one another as part of recognisable cycles, production patterns and generic tendency.

The chapters which follow draw examples from a number of horror films remade within the last decade, analysing both text and context in order to address a series of research questions. What is the horror remake's position within a wider culture of cinematic recycling, and its relationship to other adaptive forms? Can we precisely define the remake and distinguish it from these other forms? Why are horror films remade, what is the appeal for audiences, and does remaking challenge or change the status of an original text? How do remakes update both the themes and style of original films to appeal to contemporary audiences and fit with contemporary trends? Finally, should we continue to understand horror remakes as derivative copies, or can the films display originality and innovation, and significantly contribute to the genre's evolution?

This chapter introduces the topic, lays out the scope of and approach to the research, and illustrates the importance of the work as an original contribution to knowledge within the field.

Context, Scope and Approach

This project was inspired by a scholarly interest in horror films, popular American cinema and adaptation, three areas which are brought together within this study. It also represents a development of research undertaken at Masters level on Hollywood adaptations of Japanese horror films. This particular topic has received a great deal of academic attention over the last decade (see Hills 2005b, Ozawa 2006, Xu 2004, Blake 2007, Park 2009, Klein 2010 for

examples, as well as Valerie Wee's recently published monograph *Japanese Horror Films and Their American Remakes*, 2013), and my decision to focus instead on remade American films was influenced by an awareness of the growing prevalence of studies of remade Japanese horror (and broader work on genre cinema from other East Asian countries), the comparative lack of equivalent studies of remade American films which had become just as prominent by the mid-to-late 2000s, as well as concerns around the interpretation of cultural specificities and relying on subtitles for understanding original contexts.

A personal interest in the genre also encouraged this study. I do not openly claim my horror fandom here in order to somehow qualify my work or justify researching a controversial, divisive, and arguably problematic subject, as many studies of the genre begin by doing in their acknowledgements, prefaces and introductions (see for example Tudor 1989, Maddrey 2004, Francis 2013, Worland 2007, Wells 2000). The wealth of work on the topic, the genre's prolific, ever-evolving nature and vociferous fanbase continue to validate such research. Rather, I acknowledge my position as an (aspiring) 'scholar-fan' (Hills 2005a: xiii) because questions may well arise with regard to my impartiality, and this is something I have considered throughout my research. I have strived to avoid value judgements for the most part, and where they have been necessary, for example in assessing whether a remake is successful in updating or even 'correcting' an original film, I have expanded and clarified, and often draw examples from a film's critical responses in support. Furthermore, approaching this study through the framework of Adaptation Studies has provided a challenge to my initial (fan) response to many remakes. For example, having grown up with the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise as my introduction to horror cinema, I have a strong nostalgic connection to Wes Craven's original film and its numerous sequels, and as did many fans, I approached the remake with trepidation. My ultimate disappointment in the new version perhaps cannot be entirely separated from my love of the 1984 film, but my adaptation background means I can approach its study with an

understanding that the original is neither damaged nor negated by the remake (see chapter 3), and that there are appropriate ways to consider its updating that do not rely on its faithfulness (such as its production and promotion contexts, see chapter 4).

My interest in the genre has also led to frustration with those recent studies (notably Conrich 2010, Hantke 2007, 2010) which position its contemporary state (often specifically located post-*Scream*, Wes Craven, 1996) as stale, uninspired, derivative and inartistic, and its output as commercially-driven attempts to maximise profit while sacrificing originality and substance (as if to take for granted, for example, that franchises of the 1980s and 1990s were not similarly inclined, or conveniently ignoring the fact that celebrated horror auteurs of the 1970s were only able to break into commercial filmmaking through their formative work in a genre known for cheap and easy productions; see Becker 2006). Remakes are frequently cited as evidence of this, by critics and academics alike (in addition to Hantke and Conrich, see also Church 2006, 2010, Frost 2009, Gilbey 2007, B.D. Johnson 2009, Lizardi 2010, Newman 2009, Odell & LeBlanc 2007, Kermode 2003, Macauley 2003, Bacal 2004, Simon 2006). Remade American horror films sit alongside a great number of genre remakes from other countries as part of a trend of recycled stories (notably new Hollywood versions of Japanese, South Korean, Hong Kong and Thai horror films, for example *Ringu/The Ring*, Hideo Nakata, 1998/Gore Verbinski, 2002, *Ju-On: The Grudge/The Grudge*, Takeshi Shimizu, 2003/2004, *Dark Water*, Hideo Nakata, 2002/Walter Salles, 2005, *Into The Mirror/Mirrors*, Sung-ho Kim, 2003/Alexandre Aja, 2008, *A Tale of Two Sisters/The Uninvited*, Kim Jee-woon, 2003/Charles and Thomas Guard, 2009, *Shutter*, Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom, 2004/ Masayuki Ochiai, 2008). But they also represent only a portion of a genre which, despite claims to the contrary, continued to thrive and evolve over the last decade.

New franchises have appeared, some commercially successful and others appealing more to a niche audience through direct to DVD releases (*Paranormal Activity*, *Resident Evil*, *Saw*, *Hostel*, *Final Destination*, *Hatchet*,

Wrong Turn) and there have been additions to existing ones (there were five *Hellraiser* sequels since 2000, George A. Romero continued his 'Dead' series with *Land of the Dead*, 2005, *Diary of the Dead*, 2007 and *Survival of the Dead*, 2009, and both *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* had new franchise instalments before they were remade). The zombie film has seen a resurgence (ignited by British films *28 Days Later*, Danny Boyle, 2002, and *Shaun of the Dead*, Edgar Wright, 2004), including Romero's last three *Dead* films, *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007), *Zombieland* (Ruben Fleischer, 2009) *Planet Terror* (Robert Rodriguez, 2007), and many more, the popular television adaptation of the graphic novel series *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-present) sustaining its recent interest. A sub-genre of 'found footage' horror flourished; the success of *The Blair Witch Project* (Eduardo Sánchez & Daniel Myrick, 1999) inspired the release of a large number of films such as *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2009) and its sequels, *Quarantine* (John Erick Dowdle, 2008)¹ and *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010). Most recently, a number of pre-fabricated cult films have had wide release and/or marginal success (*The Cabin in the Woods*, Drew Goddard, 2012, *The House of the Devil*, Ti West, 2009, *You're Next*, Adam Wingard, 2011). Supernatural horror films *Insidious* and *Insidious Chapter 2* (James Wan, 2010/2013), *Sinister* (Scott Derrickson, 2012) and *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) made significant profits at the domestic box office, following earlier examples of psychological horror (e.g. *What Lies Beneath*, Robert Zemeckis, 2000, *The Others*, Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) which gained popularity in the wake of *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999). New horror filmmakers (Wan, Wingard, West, Rob Zombie [*House of 1000 Corpses*, 2000, *The Devil's Rejects*, 2005], Eli Roth [*Cabin Fever*, 2002, *Hostel & Hostel 2*, 2005/2007]) have carved respected niches within the genre, and anthology films such as *The ABCs of Death* (Andrews et al., 2012), *V/H/S* (Bettinelli-Olpin et al., 2012) and *V/H/S/2* (Barrett et al., 2013)

¹ Itself a remake of a Spanish film, [REC] (Jaume Balagueró & Paco Plaza, 2007).

showcase both a number of directors and the broad range of contemporary approaches to the genre.²

It is not the case, then, that remakes *dominate* modern American horror cinema; neither is it true that repetition and recycling are entirely new to the genre. This is considered in more detail in chapter 3, but can be neatly exemplified here with a mention of two iconic horror figures – Frankenstein’s monster and Dracula, both of whom have been reincarnated time and time again, from the first theatrical adaptations of Shelley and Stoker’s novels, through various appearances in versions by Universal in the 1930s and Hammer in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, further film re-adaptations in the 1990s and television productions in the 1990s and 2000s. The characters’ enduring popularity is evidenced most recently, in Dracula’s case, in a television series (Universal, 2013-present), a 2012 3D film directed by Italian horror auteur Dario Argento, and a forthcoming film, *Dracula Untold* (Gary Shore, 2014), and for Frankenstein, a 2011 theatrical production directed by Danny Boyle (popularised by live cinema broadcasts), and in comic book adaptation *I, Frankenstein* (Stuart Beattie, 2014).

While generic recycling is no new movement, and remakes only represent a small number of horror films released since the turn of the millennium, the past decade has regardless witnessed the growth of the remaking trend. Gus Van Sant’s controversial shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho* pre-empted the boom in 1998, and was followed by a brief (and not particularly successful, commercially or critically) cycle of new versions of supernatural horrors *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963/Jan De Bont, 1999), *House on Haunted Hill* (William Castle, 1959/William Malone, 1999) and *13 Ghosts* (William Castle, 1960/*Thir13en Ghosts*, Steve Beck, 2001). It was 2003’s *The*

² While the examples given in this paragraph represent the wealth of new inclusions to American horror cinema, *The ABCs of Death* and the *V/H/S* films also feature work by established and emerging filmmakers from other countries. Just as the genre is neither dead nor dying in the US, so it continued to thrive elsewhere during the 2000s – in the East Asian horror films which inspired remakes, in the ‘new French extremism’ of *Inside/À l’intérieur* (Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo, 2007) *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008) and *Frontier(s)/Frontière(s)* (Xavier Gens, 2007) and in a British horror revival (see Walker, forthcoming 2015).

*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*³ (Marcus Nispel), however, which truly initiated the trend, and it is this film which locates the earliest point of this study. Produced by a new company, Platinum Dunes, which would become associated in subsequent years with a raft of remakes, *Chainsaw* was made on account of its 'name value' and was marketed via brand recognition to a new young horror audience familiar with Tobe Hooper's 1974 film through title alone (see chapter 4 for detailed discussion). The film's low budget (under \$10m, anon, *Trendspotting*), popularity and profitability at the box office (\$107m worldwide, boxofficemojo.com) mean it represents the first significant example of the horror remake as commercial strategy.

The success of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (coupled with that of 'J-horror' remakes like *The Ring* and *The Grudge*, which had triumphed at the box office, taking \$249m and \$187m worldwide respectively, boxofficemojo.com) paved the way for a subsequent flood of popular and cult American titles from (predominantly) the 1970s and 1980s. Since 2003, almost fifty new versions of a range of older genre titles have been produced, and throughout the 2000s the number increased significantly – from three in the year of *Chainsaw*'s release and two a year later, to five in 2005 and six in 2006 (telling of the film's influence, given the time taken to produce the films). Four films were released in both 2007 and 2008. 2009 and 2010 saw the largest number of horror remakes released to date – seven in both years. Since the turn of the decade, the number has declined and seemingly plateaued – three each in 2011 and 2012, four in 2013 (see Figure 1).⁴ I would argue that ten years is not sufficient time to observe exact patterns including the rise and fall in the number of productions, and that as remakes continue to be produced, the scale of the trend cannot be entirely appreciated or examined in its totality. Not enough time has yet passed to allow the benefit of hindsight, or in turn to predict future developments (even as remakes continue to be developed, see chapter 8 for discussion). There are

³ N.b. Throughout this thesis, the use of both *Chain Saw* and *Chainsaw* reflects variations in the original and remade films' respective titles. Although Hooper's 1974 film is often referred to as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, including on its theatrical poster, the credits give its title as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Nispel's remake uses the compound *Chainsaw* within its title.

⁴ See Appendix 1 for a full list of American horror remakes since 2003.

also significant variables. Actual releases do not realistically indicate what is in production (and vice versa), figures include both mainstream theatrical, minor and direct to DVD releases, and the difficulty with clearly defining the horror remake also influences the numbers (for example, we might choose to either include or discount horror/science-fiction hybrids like *Plan 9* [John Johnson, 2013] or *The Stepford Wives* [Frank Oz, 2004], made-for-television remakes such as 2009's *Children of the Corn* [Donald P. Borchers] or, conversely, theatrical releases based on made-for-television films, for example *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* [Troy Nixey, 2010], all of which I have included here).

The remakes can be considered within broad categories. These include a number of updates of the work of particular horror auteurs, notably George A. Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968/Jeff Broadstreet, 2006, *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978/Zack Snyder, 2004, *Day of the Dead*, 1985/Steve Miner, 2008, *The Crazies*, 1973/Breck Eisner, 2010), John Carpenter (*The Fog*, 1980/Rupert Wainwright, 2005, *Halloween*, 1978/Rob Zombie, 2007, *The Thing* 1980/Matthijs van Heijningen, 2011⁵) and Wes Craven (*The Hills Have Eyes*, 1977/Alexandre Aja, 2006, *The Last House on the Left*, 1972/Denis Iliadis, 2009, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* 1984/Samuel Bayer, 2010). Brian De Palma (*Sisters*, 1973/Douglas Buck, 2006, *Carrie* 1976/Kimberly Peirce, 2013), Herschell Gordon Lewis (*Two Thousand Maniacs!*, 1964/2001 *Maniacs*, Tim Sullivan, 2005, *The Wizard of Gore*, 1970/Jeremy Kasten, 2007) and Fred Walton (*When A Stranger Calls*, 1979/Simon West, 2006, *April Fool's Day*, 1986/Mitchell Altieri & Phil Flores, 2008) have also had more than one of their films remade. Equally, contemporary directors have helmed multiple remakes – Marcus Nispel⁶ (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 2003/Tobe Hooper, 1974, *Friday the 13th*, 2009/Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), Glen Morgan (*Willard* 2003/Daniel Mann, 1971, *Black Christmas* 2006/Bob Clark, 1974), Nelson McCormick (*Prom Night*, 2008/Paul Lynch, 1980, *The Stepfather*, 2009/Joseph

⁵ Although marketed as a prequel, van Heijningen's film is arguably more accurately described as a remake. See chapter 3 for discussion.

⁶ Nispel also directed a television version of *Frankenstein* (2004) and the recent *Conan the Barbarian* reboot (2011).

Ruben, 1987) and Alexandre Aja (*The Hills Have Eyes*, *Piranha*, 2010/Joe Dante, 1978)⁷.

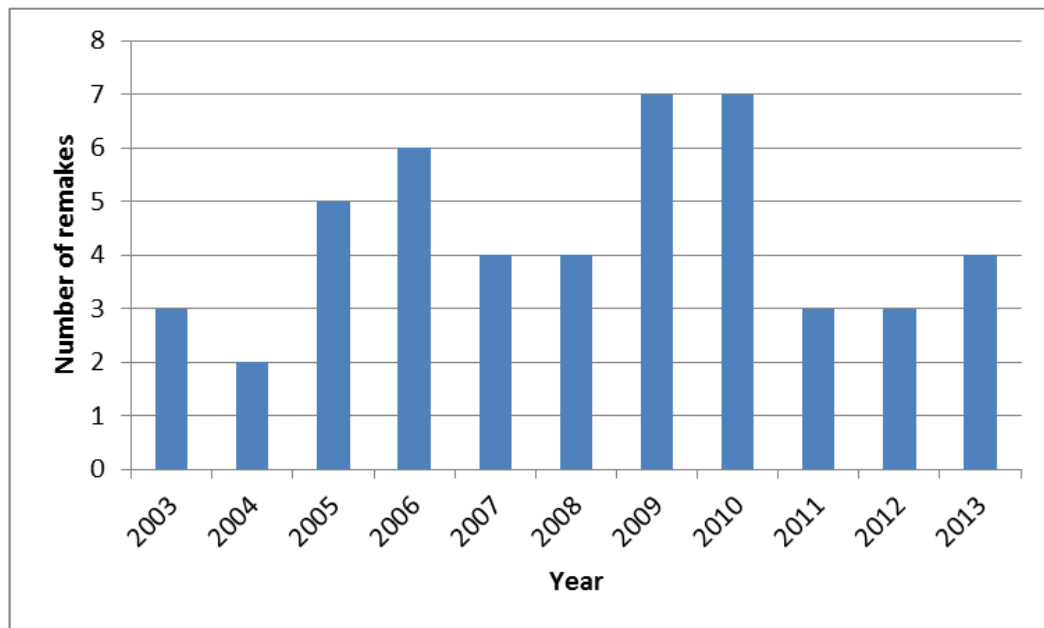


Figure 1: American horror remakes produced per year, 2003-2013

There are also patterns in the types of horror which have been remade. Cycles include the zombie film (the various remakes of Romero's ...*Dead* films), sci-fi hybrids (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Don Siegel, 1956/*The Invasion*, Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2007; the third remake following Philip Kaufman's 1978 and Abel Ferrara's 1993 versions, *The Stepford Wives*, Brian Forbes, 1975, *The Thing*), 1970s American horror (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Last House on the Left*, *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Crazies*), rape-revenge films (*The Last House on the Left*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, Meir Zarchi, 1978/Steven R. Monroe, 2010, *Straw Dogs*, Sam Peckinpah, 1971/Rod Lurie, 2011), slasher films (*Friday the 13th*, *Prom Night*, *Halloween*, *Black Christmas*, *My Bloody Valentine*, George Mihalka, 1981/Patrick Lussier, 2009, *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night*, Charles E. Sellier Jr.,

⁷ Like Nispel, Aja has been involved with additional remakes. He directed *Mirrors*, a remake of a South Korean horror film, and co-wrote and produced *Maniac* (Franck Khalfoun 2012).

1984/*Silent Night*, Steven C. Miller, 2012), exploitation (*I Spit on Your Grave*, *The Toolbox Murders*, Dennis Donnelly, 1978/Tobe Hooper, 2003, *Maniac*, William Lustig, 1980/Franck Khalfoun, 2012), psychological thrillers (*Sisters*, *The Hitcher*, Robert Harmon, 1986/Dave Meyers, 2007, *The Stepfather*, *When A Stranger Calls*) creature features (*Willard*, *Piranha*, *The Wolfman*, George Waggner, 1941/Joe Johnston, 2012) and supernatural or religious horror (*The Fog*, *The Amityville Horror*, Stuart Rosenberg, 1979/Andrew Douglas, 2005, *The Omen*, Richard Donner, 1976/John Moore, 2006).

This study does not presuppose that exactly what is meant by an 'American' horror film or remake is clear or fixed. Indeed, I realise that in using such a seemingly static label, a reader may question the inclusion of, for example, slasher films produced in Canada (*Black Christmas*, *Prom Night* or *My Bloody Valentine*), or co-productions which represent collaborations (creative and/or financial) between agents from more than one country (for example, the remakes of *Dawn of the Dead*, *Maniac*, or *The Crazies*). It seems pertinent, therefore, to provide clarification on both what I mean by an 'American horror remake', and why the boundaries have been drawn here. First, while I would argue that all of the remakes under discussion are cross-cultural in so much as they hold a temporal distance from their origin texts, and that a particular culture, and accordingly its product, may change over time and between generations, I did not wish to include pairs of films which featured a significant gap with regards to the cultural specificities determined by the *location* of their making. I have already mentioned the problems which arose in this regard around remakes of East Asian films (including the language barrier). But in limiting discussion here to that of American films, I have also omitted, for example, *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973/Neil LaBute, 2006), a Hollywood remake of a specifically British film – an anomaly among American horror remakes. *The Wicker Man* is interesting as a representation of how remakes are vilified (the film was a critical and commercial failure and garnered a cult status of its own on account of its 'badness' and Nicolas Cage's excessive central performance), but is perhaps better considered in the context of a cycle

of American remakes of cult British films such as *The Italian Job* (Peter Collinson, 1969/F. Gary Gray, 2003) and *Get Carter* (Mike Hodges, 1971/Stephen Kay, 2000).

While the research developed with an awareness of all these additional texts and their contribution to the trend, I limit close analysis to the American horror film remake. Yet this classification is difficult due to co-productions, filming locations, and filmmakers' nationalities. Definitions of national cinema remain problematic and vague, then, but here I refer to the American horror remake as a new version of a North American film, at least co-produced in America, and culturally recognisable as American (through, for example, its plot, setting or performers). My decision to include original Canadian slashers is largely due to the films' connection to a cycle seen as specifically American; furthermore, the settings of the films remain ambiguous (American flags are seen in the Canadian-produced *Black Christmas*, for example, and the college where the sorority house victims are based is never named; it is suggested that events take place on a US campus), filmmakers such as Paul Lynch and Bob Clark were not Canadian, and the decision to film north of the American border was a commercial rather than artistic one, for low budget production was encouraged by Canadian tax breaks (see Nowell 2011 for full and detailed discussion).

Approaching research of the horror remake through the theoretical framework of Adaptation Studies enables a holistic understanding of both the texts in question and the contexts which shape their creation and reception. As such, while this thesis is, first and foremost, intended as a coherent and comprehensive study of the horror remake and its position within the genre since 2003, it should also be considered as a contribution to studies of adaptation. The number of remade genre films in recent years provides a useful and illuminating example of the way in which much contemporary American cinema is comprised of adaptive texts. Films overlap and intertextually inform one another, and franchises are comprised of entries which recycle, reference, and homage earlier work. Simultaneously, thinking about remakes in such

terms allows for a deeper investigation in to a trend so especially significant (yet often ignored or maligned) within the horror genre, and allows us to understand the commercial and textual logic behind horror cinema's proclivity for recycling, recreating, reanimating and resurrecting its past. This is a study of the remake as a mode of adaptation, and of the contemporary horror remake's contribution to its genre, and it is approached with the synergy between adaptation and horror ever in mind.

The films detailed within this introduction do not represent an exhaustive account of the number of remakes released in the last decade. Nor does this opening chapter cover the multitude of ways in which we might group such films together. It is beyond the scope of this study to cover all approaches, and I have drawn parameters for debate in the chapters which follow based on significant trends and pertinent areas for discussion. My methodological approach incorporates textual analysis of the films themselves (considering key themes, tropes, and comparisons between versions) and consideration of ancillary materials such as trailers and posters, DVD special features and so on. Existing interviews with filmmakers, film reviews, previews and press reports (drawn from trade press, commercial/popular film publications and mainstream press and their associated websites), and discussions on horror websites and their associated forums also prove useful in understanding both production and reception contexts. That possibilities for further analysis remain only underlines the potential for research in this area. The horror remake, despite its prominent position in the contemporary genre, remains under considered, and the present trend is a phenomenon which warrants exploration. Existing work on the subject (notably James Francis Jr.'s *Remaking Horror: Hollywood's New Reliance on Scares of Old*, 2012, as the first academic monograph on the topic, but see also Koetting 2012, Lizardi 2010 and Frost 2009), while initiating a dialogue, is largely structured around comparative analyses of pairs of films, with a focus on arbitrary differences between versions. Approaching an understanding of the remake in this way is unproductive, and merely observes that changes do take place in the process of remaking. This study, by asking how, why and for whom

such changes occur, represents a significant contribution to knowledge, positioning the remakes within their cultural, industry and reception contexts and considering them seriously as an important feature of contemporary American horror cinema.

Structure

Expanding from this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the literature which informs and supports this study. It begins with an overview of key developments in Adaptation Studies, showing how the field has progressed from comparative analyses of novel-to-film adaptation to a more inclusive approach which considers sources from other media, theories of intertextuality and a move away from obsessive discussion of fidelity. It then surveys work on the remake, observing how much research in this area has inadvertently adopted a similar approach to those now outdated early studies of adaptation, before moving on to consider the relatively limited research on the horror remake itself. This chapter concludes with a summary of useful approaches to the horror genre which will be used throughout the rest of the study to analyse the remakes and position them within their generic contexts.

Chapter 3 develops from the literature review to address a number of questions which arise when debating the topic of horror remakes within the framework of adaptation studies. Offering a broad, theoretical intervention into studies of the remake, and drawing on a wide range of illustrative examples from horror cinema, this chapter considers remaking as one adaptive form among many in contemporary cinema, where ideas and texts are continually recycled and re-referenced. While issues of fidelity and taxonomy are exhausted in studies of adaptation, they are insufficiently covered in equivalent work on remakes. Yet, I argue, such concerns are fundamentally connected to the practice of remaking, affecting audience and critical reception to remade horror films, and so such topics must be addressed within this new context.

Moving on to closer analysis of particular sets of films, Chapters 4 and 5 provide detailed analyses of first connections and then distinctions between a number of horror remakes which can be identified in groups. Chapter 4 uses the franchise 'reboots' of a key production company, Platinum Dunes, as case studies, and interrogates the commercial strategies used in both production and marketing to show how the films are noticeably linked to their origin texts. For a remake to be successful, I argue in this chapter, it is as important to invoke audience nostalgia and recall the iconic status of key genre antagonists as to assert the remake's difference and development. Chapter 5 considers a wide range of remakes of films included within the slasher cycle (a series of films featuring a psychopathic killer who stalks and murders a series of victims) which thrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s. New versions are both influenced by and simultaneously contribute to the evolution of the horror genre, to the point where identifying a remake of such a film as a slasher itself becomes difficult. Rather than strive for over-emphasised connections in an attempt to categorise remakes within specific cycles or sub-genres, this chapter suggests it is more fruitful to instead consider their disparities as evidence of growth and examples of originality and variety within contemporary horror cinema.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on changes in the representation of politics and gender between versions of 1970s American horror films and their contemporary remakes. Discussing how examples such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Dawn of the Dead* were retrospectively heralded as allegorically rich reflections of the politically troubled decade in which they were produced, I argue in Chapter 6 that similar assertions of equivalent concerns (such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent 'War on Terror') in their remakes are overstated, that any such metaphors are ambiguous, and that ultimately, filmmakers are unconcerned with addressing such issues in new versions. Chapter 7 focuses on two remakes of 1970s rape-revenge films, *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave*, considering the ways in which they update the portrayal of their female protagonists as both victim and avenger, and arguing that they do this in

order to both appeal to a contemporary audience and to align the films more coherently with modern horror trends.

This study concludes in chapter 8 by briefly considering the opposing reactions to two recent horror remakes, *Carrie* and *Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981/Fede Alvarez, 2013), which further exemplify the differentiations between new versions and the ways in which they are received. I also discuss the current (and potential future) state of the trend. Finally, I summarise and reiterate answers developed within the following chapters to a series of general questions initiated by this introduction. Is it possible to precisely define and categorise the horror remake? Can remakes ever be considered to display originality, or does their nature reduce them to simplistic 'copy'? What concerns audiences and critics? Ultimately, why does the remake prevail in contemporary popular cinema – what is the 'point' of remaking?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Even though the practice of remaking is prevalent in contemporary cinema, academic studies of both the films considered in this study and the process of their recycling are fairly uncommon. Work on the horror remake itself is rare and has only recently begun to emerge. This chapter outlines existing studies of adaptation and remaking to illustrate how this thesis represents a significant contribution to knowledge in these fields. It also highlights the key works used for contextualising and approaching research on the horror remake; not only those specifically concerned with adaptation, but also studies of the horror genre which contribute to an understanding of both its present and historical states, and are useful when considering individual films, sub-genres or cycles. In addition to contributing to studies of remaking, this thesis also complements work on horror by understanding the remakes as legitimate texts in genre cinema.

Adaptation Studies

Until the last decade or so, work within Adaptation Studies followed a primarily literary focused approach, considering adaptations of canonical works of literature from a mostly negative perspective as ‘inferior, diluted versions of an ‘original’” (Cartmell et al, 2008:2), judged for their fidelity (or lack thereof) to the source text. While undoubtedly influential and ‘all-but-pioneering’ (McFarlane, 1996:4) within the field, George Bluestone’s 1957 *Novels Into Film*, along with other early work, has been criticised by many theorists in newer studies (for example Ray 2000, Stam 2005a, Cartmell et al 2008, Hutcheon 2006, Geraghty 2007, Leitch 2007, 2008) for this problematic approach.

The case studies (and indeed the title) of Brian McFarlane’s 1996 monograph *Novel to Film* do make evident the tendency to privilege literature over film in Adaptation Studies. Yet his work is pre-emptive of the shift in critical

thinking and theoretical debates surrounding adaptation that would emerge in the following decade. McFarlane acknowledges the futility of the fidelity debate, arguing 'no critical line is in greater need of re-examination – and devaluation' (McFarlane, 1996: 8). The predilection towards discourses of faithfulness is due, he suggests, to a number of factors – the temporal relationship between novel and film (simply, 'the novel's coming first'), the 'ingrained sense of literature's greater respectability in traditional critical circles' and the measure of fidelity as a 'desirable goal' for filmmakers adapting literature (McFarlane, 1996: 8-9). McFarlane suggests an alternative approach which uses theories of intertextuality, considering the novel as but one resource among other aspects (industrial factors, socio-cultural climate, generic conventions, director or star style) which could be seen to influence and shape any film. His proposed 'new agenda' for Adaptation Studies includes the investigation of just what it is possible to adapt or transfer from a source text, as well as the intertextual construction of filmed versions of novels (McFarlane, 1996: 21-22).

Robert B. Ray's influential 2000 essay 'The Field of "Literature and Film"' functions almost as a critique of earlier work in Adaptation Studies, claiming that the subject was in disrepute throughout the 1980s and 1990s, 'as if the sensed inadequacies of the field's principal books, journals and textbooks had somehow discredited the subject itself' (Ray, 2000: 38). Ray is not only critical of the fidelity debate and the literary-centric approach of earlier Adaptation Studies, but also the over-reliance on comparative case studies. His work arguably takes a more theoretical approach to adaptation than his predecessors, citing Brecht, Bakhtin, Barthes, and Derrida and thus marking a change in thinking within Adaptation Studies. Ray suggests possibilities for future work – namely the consideration of postmodernism in texts, and a wider acknowledgement of media other than the book and the film (Ray, 2000: 48-49). Ray's essay is reproduced within James Naremore's edited collection, *Film Adaptation* (2000), which opens with the editor's introductory chapter: 'Film and the Reign of Adaptation', insightfully (and relevantly to this study) suggesting that:

the study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication. By this means, adaptation will become part of a general theory of repetition, and adaptation study will move from the margins to the center of contemporary media studies (Naremore, 2000: 15).

Film Adaptation features further essays on theories of adaptation (Bazin 1948, Andrew 1984, Stam 2000) in its first part, before moving on to a series of case studies of adaptations which focus on certain socio-political, cultural and industrial contexts rather than comparative analyses of fidelity. While these essays use primarily literature-to-film examples and are thus of little relevance to this particular study, the range of themes in question (censorship [Maltby 1992], Dickens and the Great Depression [DeBona 2000], Brazilian politics [Sadlier 2000]) highlight just how productive it can be to consider the importance of external factors rather than just the texts themselves.

By the mid-2000s, the condemnation of previous work on adaptation apparent in both McFarlane's book and the essays within Naremore's collection had become commonplace. Robert Stam's 'The Theory and Practice of Adaptation' (2005a) begins with criticism of the hostilities towards adaptations in those 'profoundly moralistic' earlier studies which 'reinscribe the axiomatic superiority of literature to film' (Stam, 2005a: 3-4). Stam argues from a post-structuralist perspective that intertextuality theory and deconstruction 'dismantled the hierarchy of 'original' and 'copy'', (Stam, 2005a: 8) and again stresses the need to move away from the fidelity debate. Instead, he reiterates the suggestion that it would be far more productive to apply theoretical frameworks of narratology and intertextuality. While Gérard Genette's work had been cited previously in adaptation studies (as acknowledged by Naremore 2000: 7), Stam's (2000, 2005a) application of Genette's 'transtextuality' proves most useful in the analysis of both the process of adaptation and the adapted texts themselves. Genette proposed five types of transtextuality, his first (and most commonly used, widely appropriated) being intertextuality. Second is 'paratextuality', or the relationship between the text itself and those accessory 'paratexts' which surround it and infer further meaning or shape understanding.

In this example, paratexts would include ancillary materials to a film such as trailers, posters, reviews, DVD commentaries and so on. Genette's third category, 'metatextuality', refers to 'the critical relation between one text and another, whether the commented text is explicitly cited or only silently evoked' (Stam, 2005a: 28). His fourth transtextual type, 'architextuality', describes 'the generic taxonomies suggested or refused by the titles or subtitles of a text' (Stam, 2005a: 30). Stam suggests that, with the exception of evoking copyright issues and considering disguised, renamed, or unacknowledged adaptations, this is arguably the least relevant to adaptation studies (Stam, 2005a: 30-31). However, Genette's fifth and final category, 'hypertextuality', is probably the most important of all; the relationship between an existing 'hypotext' and the 'hypertext' (or adaptation, in this case) which 'transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends' it (Stam, 2005a: 31). Adaptations, when considered in a transtextual framework (and especially through hypertextuality), are 'caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation, with no clear point of origin' (Stam, 2005a: 31). Stam suggests that Genette's work on narratology within the novel provides a useful model for analysing book-to-film adaptations, but his own further suggestions for studying changes in narratives across adaptations could more productively be applied to discussions of non-literary media (or indeed film remakes). This comparative narratology, Stam posits, asks questions about not just what has changed, been added or eliminated, enhanced or replaced in a new version – but, more importantly, why (Stam, 2005a: 34).

While Stam offers productive theoretical frameworks for studies of adaptation, he rightly expresses caution at using an exclusively formalist approach at the risk of missing deeper contextual analyses. Temporal and spatial contexts are important, and consideration should be given to the time between the productions of the initial and adapted texts, or the notion of cross-cultural or cross-national adaptations. Contemporary ideology and social discourse should also be taken into consideration (Stam, 2005a: 41-44).

Ultimately, Stam's work suggests that the adaptation (as text) is as much a product of its own time and space (and the contexts that accompany these) as it is derived from its source:

[Adaptation]...is a work of reaccentuation whereby a source work is interpreted through new grids and discourses. Each grid, in revealing aspects of the source text in question also reveals something about the ambient discourses in the moment of reaccentuation. By revealing the prisms and grids and discourses through which the novel has been reimagined, adaptation grants a kind of objective materiality to the discourses themselves, giving them visible, audible and perceptive form (Stam, 2005a: 45).

In conclusion, Stam observes that work in Adaptation Studies is too often rigid in its assumption that any source text is literary. All films can, he suggests, be considered adaptations of sorts (even those which simply adapt an original screenplay); all texts are intertextually mediated and thus derivative on some level, and there is a need to look beyond the novel to 'sub-literary' or 'paraliterary' sources (Stam, 2005a: 45).

Subsequent works on adaptation (Hutcheon 2006, Leitch 2007, Geraghty 2007) take Stam's landmark essay and frameworks of intertextuality as starting points for more considered theoretical debates on adaptation. Linda Hutcheon, like Stam, notes the importance of context: 'even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context – that is, for example, in a national setting or time period – can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally' (Hutcheon 2006: 28). Hutcheon considers adaptation across a number of different media as a form of 'cultural recycling', where one text borrows from another and these different versions 'exist laterally, not vertically' (Hutcheon 2006: xiii), thus challenging both the prevalence and the hierarchical nature of the novel to film debate and its accompanying clichés. The appeal and enduring popularity of adaptations, she argues; 'comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change' (Hutcheon 2006: 4).

Hutcheon defines adaptation in three ways. Firstly, as a product or formal entity, an 'announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works' (Hutcheon 2006: 7). Secondly, as a creative and interpretative process, and finally through a process of reception as a form of intertextuality, where an adaptation is experienced alongside the memory of the sources from which it draws (Hutcheon 2006: 8).

Hutcheon also considers the reasons for adapting a text. Firstly, the economic opportunities afforded by a 'ready-made' audience and the possibility of promoting an adaptation to this audience on name alone. The opportunity to achieve cultural capital through an 'upwardly mobile' adaptation should also be considered. So too should the personal or political motives of the adapters who seek to homage or critique an earlier work (Hutcheon 2006: 86-92). The idea of a 'knowing' audience is also discussed at some length in Hutcheon's book, lending weight to the usefulness of theories of intertextuality. An audience familiar with the source text, or the work of a particular director or actor involved in an adaptation, for example, will have certain understandings and expectations. For an adaptation to be a stand-alone success, then, it must cater to both this audience and the 'unknowing' one (Hutcheon 2006: 120-126).

Like so much contemporary work in adaptation, Thomas Leitch maintains that discourses of faithfulness within the field are ultimately pointless, observing: 'the main reason adaptations rarely achieve anything like fidelity is because they rarely attempt it' (Leitch 2007: 127). Leitch's 2007 monograph *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* echoes the sentiments of Ray (2000), Stam (2000, 2005a) and Hutcheon (2006) in instead proposing intertextuality as a more appropriate framework for adaptation studies, and considering broad questions raised by adaptations rather than comparative case studies of specific paired texts. Most relevant to this particular study is the consideration of adaptations from sources other than literature (video games, comics, theme park attractions) – what Leitch calls the 'postliterary adaptation' – media which 'warrant a closer look because they throw a new light on the subject of adaptation and suggest a possible alternative to the chimerical quest for fidelity'

(Leitch 2007: 258). Yet Leitch sees these postliterary adaptations as ultimately commercially driven products, chiming with those negative critical responses to remaking: 'for all the obvious points of contrast with the gentility of literary adaptation as process and industry, postliterary adaptation seems like one more version of business as usual – with the emphasis, as usual, on business' (Leitch 2007: 279).

While studies of adaptation continue to move away from debates around fidelity, and increasingly consider media other than the novel (see D.T. Johnson 2009, Moore 2010, Hayton 2011 for examples), even the most recent publications hint at the persistent literary-centric nature of the field and its obsession with faithfulness (see for example MacCabe et al. 2011, Snyder 2011). It seems logical that remaking should be considered a form of film-to-film adaptation, and that many of the intertextual arguments and theoretical frameworks constructed by Ray, Stam and Hutcheon provide useful methods by which to analyse both the process of remaking and film remakes themselves as intertextual products. Replacing the word 'novel' or 'book' in many examples from the studies above with 'film' suggests just how interchangeable the theories could be. As Linda Hutcheon notes: 'remakes are invariably adaptations because of changes in context. So not all adaptations necessarily involve a shift of media or mode of engagement, though many do' (Hutcheon 2006: 170). Yet this is one of very few examples of the cursory mention that remaking receives in adaptation studies. The field has, to date, shown hesitation to move forward and include 'film' in its studies of (to use Leitch's term) postliterary adaptations – a problem addressed by this study.

Remakes and Remaking

Despite the proliferation of remaking, and consistent non-academic (specifically press and critical, often negative) commentary on film remakes, serious in-depth studies of the practice have only emerged within the last two decades. This prior lack of attention is noted by Andrew Horton and Stuart McDougal in their introduction to *Play It Again, Sam* (1998), an edited collection covering

Hollywood remakes, cross-cultural remaking, and the adaptation of film into other media. Horton and McDougal's introductory chapter is notable for identifying their consideration of 'remakes as aesthetic or cinematic texts and as ideological expressions of cultural discourse set in particular times, contexts and societies' (Horton and McDougal 1998: 1). Furthermore, they acknowledge that the remake is certainly neither a new conceptual creation, nor exclusive to cinema – classic myths were retold by the Greek dramatists, Chaucer and Shakespeare 'borrowed liberally' from predecessors, and subsequent texts were constructed on an even more self-conscious level (Horton and McDougal 1998: 2). Contextual and intertextual factors are as essential to Horton and McDougal as they are in contemporary studies of adaptation.

These aspects are also of importance to the book's contributors. Robert Eberwein is especially concerned with the contextual (cultural) understanding of the remake and the original film - both at its time of production and retrospectively, alongside a new version (Eberwein 1998). Leo Braudy acknowledges that 'the remake can exist anywhere on an intertextual continuum from allusions in specific lines, individual scenes and camera style to the explicit patterning of an entire film on a previous exemplar' (Braudy 1998: 327). Yet despite this productive approach to remaking, there are parallels in *Play It Again, Sam* with that earlier work on adaptation which has subsequently been criticised. Many of the essays discuss new versions of respected 'classics', art films, works by considered auteurs (Hitchcock, Godard), or numerous retellings of well familiar tales (Dracula, Robin Hood). The book concludes with Braudy's afterword, which argues that 'to remake is to want to re-read – to believe in an explicit way that the past reading was wrong or outdated and that a new one must be done' (Braudy 1998: 332). The reductive generalisation that 'remakes are invariably inferior to their originals' (Braudy 1998: 329) highlights just how reminiscent of earlier work in adaptation the tone of many of the inclusions here are. While Horton and McDougal's book makes a valid and important contribution (introduction, even) to studies of the film remake, it is somewhat problematic in its over reliance on comparative case

studies (similar to that work later criticised by the likes of Leitch and Ray), and in the privileging of original over new versions of films – as with those literary-centric discussions of fidelity in early adaptation studies.

Conversely, and more objectively, Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos' introduction to their edited collection *Dead Ringers* (2002) suggests that the number of 'uninspired' remakes is 'probably in proportion to the amount of uninspired "original" films produced annually' (Forrest & Koos 2002:3), and posit that the remake should be considered as a valid art form in itself, rather than symptomatic of an uninspired, parasitic film industry. *Dead Ringers*, they claim, 'proposes to remove the phenomenon from the purgatory of casual reference and the summary dismissal and place it within the purview of serious film criticism' (Forrest & Koos 2002: 3). This is not to suggest that understanding the practice of remaking within its economic, industrial contexts is not important, and some of the examples that Forrest and Koos discuss to this end illustrate how these commercial reasons for remaking are not always negative. The earliest of remakes were created to replace the 'exhausted' negatives of popular films, remaking kept independent production companies afloat during the Depression, and still today films are remade in order to test new (and potentially expensive) technological advances within the safety of a presold property (Forrest & Koos 2002: 3-4). Forrest and Koos are also particularly concerned with the ideological implications of American studios remaking foreign films, drawing examples from 1980s Hollywood reinterpretations of French cinema (arguably, this specific area of cross-cultural remaking is one of the more widely discussed in studies of the remake, featuring in several essays in Forrest & Koos' book, and again in *Play It Again, Sam*, providing rich examples for discussion in Constantine Verevis' *Film Remakes* (2006), and even as the subject of an entire monograph [Mazdon 2000]).

Given Thomas Leitch's forward-thinking work on adaptation, his essay in *Dead Ringers*, 'Twice Told Tales', seems at odds with both the progressive aim of Forrest and Koos' book and his own later study. Leitch provides what he describes as an 'exhaustive, albeit severely simplified' (Leitch 2002:54)

taxonomy of the remake – readaptations, updates, homages, and true remakes – which could prove useful when investigating the reasons for remaking films. Otherwise, his suggestions prove largely unproductive. Leitch argues that film remakes are different to other adaptations as they form part of a triangular relationship between the source text, the original film and the remake itself (Leitch 2002: 39); but this assumption that all remakes are based on adaptations themselves does not take into consideration that the ‘source text’ in question may well be the original film. Leitch also maintains that remakes provide a direct competition to the original, threatening their economic viability (Leitch 2002: 39), but he does not consider the possibility that the remake may bring a new audience (and in turn, new revenue) to the original, or that the (re)makers pay the copyright holders of the original film.

Both Leitch’s triangular model and his argument that remakes marginalise the original film are contested by Constantine Verevis in his comprehensive and constructive 2006 monograph *Film Remakes* (Verevis 2006: 14-16), which expands on his essay on remaking for *Film Studies* in 2004. Verevis’ book explores ‘remaking as both an elastic concept and a complex situation’ (Verevis 2006: viii), and avoids case studies of specific paired texts which privilege original films, thus mirroring the progressive work in Adaptation Studies around this time. He identifies three categories of remaking in his introduction – industrial, textual and critical – which are then explored in greater detail as three parts to the body of his book. The first, remaking as industrial category, considers the film remake as a ‘pre-sold’ product with a guaranteed audience (and thus potential capital) (Verevis 2006: 3). From this approach, Verevis’ idea of the remake as a commercial product risks echoing those wider critical opinions which view the process of remaking as cannibalistic, exemplary of a lack of creativity within the industry which is encouraged by the ‘commercial orientation of the conglomerate ownership of Hollywood’ (Verevis 2006: 4). However, rather than treating the remake purely as a cynical exercise in securing revenue, Verevis’ industrial category takes into consideration the necessity of its doing so. Film (in this industrial context at

least) is a commercial product intended to make money and Verevis is astute in his observation that remakes are thought to 'repeat successful formulas in order to minimise risk and secure profits in the marketplace' (Verevis 2006: 37), to revive franchises and create new cross-media market potential, or to take advantage of the opportunities awarded by the development of new technologies unavailable at the time of the original release (Verevis 2006: 38). Despite his acceptance of the inevitability of film remakes being considered within these commercial contexts, Verevis is keen to align even his industrial category with an intertextual approach, and argues that if all films can, to some extent, be considered a copy, then remakes should not be dismissed as simplistic, derivative 'rip offs' designed to cash in on the success or familiarity of an original (Verevis 2006: 59). Tellingly, Verevis' selection of Gus Van Sant's 'replica' of Hitchcock's *Psycho* as an example for this category highlights how both commercial and (inter)textual factors can be considered alongside one another in discourses of adaptation. While critics and audiences often bemoan the lack of fidelity to a source text, here their issue with Van Sant's version was that it was largely a shot-for-shot imitation with no perceived originality and no style of its own:

For these fans and critics – for these re-viewers – the *Psycho* remake was ultimately nothing more than a blatant rip-off: not only an attempt to exploit the original film's legendary status, but (worse) a cheap imitation of 'one of the best' and best known American films (Verevis 2006: 58).

The reception of Van Sant's *Psycho* chimes with much criticism of remakes (and adaptation more widely) in that it retains an insistence on prioritising or privileging the original text, and thus largely positions the remake as an (often unsuccessful) imitation. Yet as Verevis suggests in his case study, there are other, more fruitful approaches to understanding the remake. This would include questions of authorship, specifically Hitchcock's tendency to 'remake himself' across his oeuvre, his authorial and artistic legacy on the horror genre (especially the slasher film) and the countless homages to his work in cinema more widely (Verevis 2006: 59-76). Although it is not considered in Verevis' chapter, his argument could presumably be widened to include

discussion of Van Sant's reputation as a provocative Hollywood 'enfant terrible' and the influence of this on the reception of his *Psycho*.

Verevis' second type of remaking, as a textual category, furthers these theories of intertextuality. It also strives to more clearly define the notion of the remake itself. Remaking can widely be understood to exist as a process which could arguably sit anywhere along Braudy's (1998) intertextual continuum – from the repetition or recollection of iconic shots or scenes, the 'autocitation' or self-quotation of a director remaking their own work, intratextuality through the allusion to the remaking process itself, and so on (Verevis 2006:19-22). Even the most basic categorisation of the remake is hindered, Verevis argues, by the 'unacknowledged' remake, or versions which take only titles from their source text, changing characters, settings and plot (Verevis 2006: 22). Yet, he suggests, remakes are mainly understood as:

[...] (more particular) intertextual structures which are stabilised, or limited, through the naming and (usually) legally sanctioned (or copyrighted) use of a particular literary and/or cinematic source which serves as a retrospectively designated point of origin and semantic fixity. In addition, these intertextual structures (unlike those of genre) are highly particular in their repetition of narrative units, and these repetitions most often (though certainly not always) relate to the content ('the order of the message') rather than to the form (or 'the code') of the film. (Verevis 2006: 21)

Verevis' textual category addresses those discourses of fidelity which are often as prevalent in discussions of remaking as they are in theories of adaptation; acknowledging that the status and appreciation of the original text can influence the reception of its remake, but that ultimately any similarity or difference from the original only serves to 'affirm the identity and integrity of the (presumed) original' (Verevis 2006: 82). Textual understanding of the remake seeks to appreciate the process of adaptation itself and how that process updates, redefines or transforms its source through historical changes, industrial progress, and contemporary contextual factors such as ideology and politics: 'textual accounts of remaking need to be placed in a contextual history, in a "sociology [of remaking] that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the

audience, and the [...broader] culture industry” (Naremore 2000: 10, quoted in Verevis 2006: 101).

Verevis' third and final category considers the importance of both audience and critical discourse upon the understanding and reception of film remakes. Acknowledged remakes, relying on the popularity or familiarity of the original, use their title alone to sell themselves to a pre-existing audience, and will often draw attention to their remake status in promotional materials and discourses (Verevis 2006: 131-132). In more recent cases, the producers of a remake will both ascribe some value to the original film ('why remake a film if it doesn't have something to recommend it to begin with?' asks Verevis [2006:134]), while seeking to differentiate their new version, often labelling it as a 'reboot' or 'update' or 're-envisioning' rather than a remake.¹ In this sense, the marketing not only works to promote a film to an audience, but also contributes to discourses of remaking more widely (Verevis 2006: 135). However, drawing attention to a film's status as a remake (whether to associate it with the original or seek to prove how it is different or why it is superior) is not always the most pertinent factor in its marketing, and often a different aspect of the film is promoted above its relationship to any precursor for audiences potentially unfamiliar with the earlier film, for example as a star or director vehicle or a new key genre text (Verevis 2006: 146-147). Regardless of whether a new version is actively promoted as a remake or not, the framing of it as such through audience familiarity with the original, or reviews and other critical discourse, creates a kind of 'horizon of expectations that at once enables and limits spectatorial response: opening up some meanings, closing down others' (Verevis 2006: 148). *Film Remakes* concludes by underlining the importance of those intertextual factors at work in the retelling of earlier texts, using the films of Quentin Tarantino to show that 'all films – originals and/as remakes – invest in the repetition effects that characterise all films, all of cinema itself' (Verevis 2006: 177).

Published in the same year as Verevis' book, Anat Zanger's monograph *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise* (2006) uses the examples of (briefly)

Psycho, *Carmen* and *Joan of Arc* to explore issues of feminism and intertextuality in what she refers to as 'multi-versions', arguing that 'the constant repetition of the same tale keeps it alive in social memory, continually transmitting its meaning and relevance' (Zanger 2006: 9). The specificities of Zanger's book – particularly the very close analysis of the numerous retellings of *Carmen* and *Joan of Arc* that make up its body, and the fact that these constitute intertextual 'multi-versions' of retold tales rather than more acknowledged, direct remakes – mean that it is not especially productive in providing any kind of context for this particular study. It is noteworthy, however, for discussion on 'disguised' remakes (interestingly, Zanger sees Lars Von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* [1996] and David Fincher's *Alien 3* [1992] as accounts of the story of *Joan of Arc* [Zanger 2006: 107-112]), for its pervading intertextual approach, and for observing patterns of variation and repetition between versions which provide an appeal for audiences (as suggested elsewhere by Verevis [2006] and Hutcheon [2006]). Zanger's application of Umberto Eco's philosophising on cultural repetition offers arguably one of the more logical explanations on the enduring popularity of retold tales:

(1) Something is offered as original and different (according to the requirements of modern aesthetics); (2) we are aware that this something is repeating something else that we already know; and (3) notwithstanding this – better just because of it – we like it (and buy it) (Eco 1985:167, quoted in Zanger 2006:18).

Horror Remakes

Two monographs aiming to respond to the recent rise in production of American horror remakes have emerged since the inception of this study. While both are unarguably timely, reflecting the trend and responding to the need for its serious consideration, neither provide particularly original, productive or scholarly frameworks for the films' contextualisation or analysis. This is not, however, the purpose of the first book, Christopher T. Koetting's *Retro Screams: Terror in the New Millennium* (2012), a commercial rather than academic publication aimed

at genre fans. Koetting accurately locates the trend as having grown in the 2000s, discusses the involvement of key industry figures such as the production company Platinum Dunes (discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis), and observes illuminating patterns of production. Specifically, his book is structured into chapters which focus on the remade works of three horror auteurs (John Carpenter, Wes Craven, George A. Romero), Platinum Dunes' remakes, and new versions of films from the American-Canadian slasher cycle of the 1980s (considered here in chapter 5). Koetting's comparative discussions of pairs of remade films which fall into these categories are highly detailed, providing minutiae on various aspects (development and production histories and trivia, script changes, cast and crew, reviews, etc.) of both originals and remakes. *Retro Screams* is a relatively comprehensive introduction to the trend and does compile some useful information, but this is mostly reproduced from (unreferenced) secondary sources and is not analysed, rendering it largely unsuitable for academic application (which is, of course, not Koetting's intention).

The second monograph on the topic to be published is *Remaking Horror: Hollywood's New Reliance on Scares of Old* (James Francis, Jr. 2012). Francis observes in his introduction that despite the attention horror remakes are awarded by audiences and critics, 'no-one has given this genre movement critical, academic attention', and he positions his work as a 'dedicated effort to begin formal discussion' (Francis, 2012: 8). Francis' failure to cite the relevant few existing academic studies on the topic indicates a resistance to engage with (or ignorance of) other work in the area – there is no acknowledgement of the edited collections and individual essays discussed in this Chapter, for example (e.g. Lukas & Marmysz 2009, Hand & McRoy 2007, Frost 2009, Lizardi 2009). Francis does not explicitly state that the focus of his book is on American remakes of specifically American films of any given time – observing that remakes of both domestic and foreign films initially made between 1930 and the 2000s are now produced in the United States (Francis, 2012: 2) – yet the emphasis throughout the first half of the book is on key domestic films. This

begins with a comparative study of *Psycho* and its remake, and then moves on to consider three franchises which 'Hitchcock's movie gave birth to' (Francis, 2012: 8), *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Each of these chapters is similarly structured. Francis provides production history and cast backgrounds, assesses the ways in which the films portray and/or instil fear, and provides highly descriptive plot synopses for the original films and their sequels, before moving on to discuss the remakes. The chapters are significantly weighted towards a focus on the original films, and the attention given to the new versions largely highlights arbitrary plot and production differences. There is insufficient analysis here to constitute any form of argument or identify coherent patterns or connections among the remade films.

Remaking Horror's second half includes a chapter which surveys the trend for recycling in horror cinema from 1930s adaptations of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* through to the present day. This does exemplify the continued popularity of retold tales in horror and provides a very detailed historical overview of the genre's proclivity for repetition. However, this section is again overly descriptive rather than analytical, a weakness perhaps symptomatic of covering such a rich historical background in one chapter without temporal parameters, which does not allow the space or scope for serious, detailed consideration of key films and cycles. Furthermore, Francis' insistence on structuring this chapter according to the release years of the original versions, rather than focusing on how remaking itself has developed, both renders it confusing and once more privileges first versions over and above adaptations. A series of interviews with a number of notable figures follow (for example *A Nightmare on Elm Street* actor Robert Englund and former editor of *Fangoria* magazine Tony Timpone), and they provide some illuminating discussions on how the 'state' of contemporary horror is viewed within the industry itself (Francis, 2012: 146-165). Yet their significance is undermined within the context of Francis' study, as they only serve to outline many prominent opinions on the remake as parasitic and supposedly evident of the lack of creativity in modern genre cinema. Ultimately, while Francis' work does introduce the topic to

academic debate, it offers no original argument. Furthermore, the study aligns itself with the unproductive critical discourses of pointlessness and simple profitability by refusing to engage with the films on any deeper level. This is evident, for example, in Francis' focus on finances and personnel, and his observation that remakes 'cannot fully embrace [the] combined cinematic effect' of both 'inject[ing] fear' and 'inspir[ing] thought-provoking discussions' offered by originals (Francis, 2012: 6).

Although a coherent monograph on the topic has yet to be published, relevant work on horror remakes has appeared in edited collections. Scott A. Lukas and John Marmysz's introduction to their edited collection *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation: Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy Films Remade* (2009) reiterates the productive suggestion that remakes should be considered on their own terms within their own contexts rather than simply in comparison to their supposedly superior source texts. Genre film remakes, they argue, are allegorically rich vehicles which 'offer the opportunity to revisit important issues, stories, themes and topics in ways that speak to contemporary audiences' (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 2). Their highly theoretical opening chapter suggests that the remake can be understood as a nihilistic category – not only in the derogatory sense that permeates critical discourse surrounding remaking, but also as representative of 'the hope for ongoing and never-ending interpretation' (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 3). As they argue:

To characterise the film remake as a nihilistic category [...] is not necessarily to denigrate or insult it, but to elevate it and to celebrate its potential for encouraging in us an ongoing and never-ending search for truths that, in the end, inevitably slip from our grasp (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 3).

Lukas and Marmysz draw on the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard, the idea that concepts of 'copy' and 'original' have become colluded to the point that it is almost impossible to differentiate between the two; thus supporting those intertextual approaches to adaptation and remaking (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 4). Any source text itself must by its very nature be intertextual – whether simply through the act of adapting a screenplay (as per Stam's observation

discussed above) or through external inspiration or influence throughout the process of its creation. Thus, any remake 'involves a re-presentation of a re-presentation', and rather than being simply imitative, 'no remake is, in fact, an exact replica of the film it has remade, and so there is always some degree of creative originality involved in its production' – even in, for example, the ironic mimicry of Van Sant's *Psycho* (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 5). This chapter also offers a similar argument to Verevis, Hutcheon, and Zanger for the appeal of remakes being that of a ritualistic pattern of variation and repetition. Lukas and Marmysz cite Aristotle, who 'saw special value in the repetition of dramatic performances because each repetition allowed people the leisure to experience a cathartic release of emotion under safe circumstances'. The revisiting of particular stories, they argue, play a part in a 'psychological connection to a shared social world', and perform a certain social function 'by binding us all together with commonly shared stories that speak to our particular fears, anxieties, and hopes for the future' (Lukas & Marmysz 2009: 8-9).

The essays contained within the body of Lukas and Marmysz's book function mostly as case studies of particular remakes of horror, science fiction and fantasy films, often concerned with how the films are updated from their source to allude to contemporary social, political or cultural concerns. Of some interest to this study, Juneko J. Robinson's study of four *Body Snatchers* films traces changes between the texts from an existentialist perspective, observing different themes and allegorical references across the versions; from 'the threat of oppressive conformity as manifested under communism and McCarthyism' (Robinson 2009: 28) in Don Siegel's 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* through to the references to post 9/11 American culture in the most recent retelling, *The Invasion*. Iis Huygens' essay also focuses on the *Body Snatchers* films, this time from a psychoanalytical perspective, dealing with 'monstrous mothers' and symbolic castration. In his piece 'Remaking Romero', Shane Borrowman maps changes in representations of class, race, family and gender from Romero's 1968 *Night of The Living Dead* to Tom Savini's 1990 remake, and, most relevantly here, in the two versions of *Dawn of the Dead*. The other

inclusions in *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation*, while concentrating on texts largely outside the realm of this project, offer insightful studies of various issues associated with remaking which could be applied to analysis of other films. This includes discussion of copyright regimes (Park 2009), transnational and cross cultural remaking (Park 2009, Herbert 2009), remaking and reception of blockbusters (Jones 2009), fan films as remakes (Frazetti 2009), new technologies and remaking (Frazetti 2009, Constandinides 2009), and cross-media adaptation (Lukas 2009).

Studies of genre adaptations feature elsewhere in many of the edited collections on remaking. Horton and McDougal's book includes essays on Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (Brashinsky 1998), an uncredited remake of Ingmar Bergman's *Virgin Spring* (1960), which has been subsequently remade itself; as well as studies of retelling *Dracula* and *Nosferatu* (Konigsberg 1998, Michaels 1998). *Dead Ringers* features a chapter on *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Philip Kaufman, 1978) remakes (Roth 2002). The introduction to Richard J. Hand and Jay McRoy's 2007 edited collection *Monstrous Adaptations* draws parallels between the practice of adaptation in horror cinema (from myths, novels, and other films) and themes of adaptation in the films themselves. As they note, 'horror film thrives on the notion of transformation', from mutation, metamorphosis, and transformation (in both the literal body and body politic), to the 'adaptive journey' from life to death (Hand & McRoy 2007: 1-2). The essays in Hand & McRoy's book address adaption across various media, considering it as 'both an aesthetic process and a thematic preoccupation' (Hand & McRoy 2007: 3). As with similar edited collections, the examples used as case studies render many of the inclusions redundant to this study, but the range of inclusions indicate the potential for research on genre remakes. The chapters on remaking cover *Body Snatchers* (focusing on Abel Ferrara's 1993 version this time) and *Psycho* again (McRoy 2007, Pomerance 2007 respectively), and consider (problematic) notions of cross-cultural adaptation in Linnie Blake's essay on the Japanese *Ringu* and its American remake *The Ring*.

Collections such as *Dead Ringers*, *Play it Again, Sam*, *Monstrous Adaptations* and *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation* provide a few directly relevant studies, and the scope of theoretical perspectives in question show the different ways in which adaptation can be addressed rather than simply discussing fidelity or lack thereof to the source text. Yet the concentration on case studies in these books often reduces the discussion of remaking to a focus on particular pairs of films, which ultimately fails to fully appreciate remakes within their own contexts or to observe wider trends, patterns and connections. Furthermore, while their respective introductions outline some general arguments around remaking, and are useful in beginning to offer both a defence and explanation of the practice, the limits of their short form mean they are not ideally positioned to offer more in-depth analysis.

Case studies of horror remakes from the last decade (in addition to those mentioned above) have appeared in both journals and edited collections alike. Academic writing on the glut of Hollywood versions of East Asian horror films is now common (see Hills 2005b, Ozawa 2006, Xu 2004, Blake 2007, Park 2009, Klein 2010 for examples), largely due to the transnational and transcultural factors involved in their adaptation. These often revolve around discourses of American imperialism reminiscent of those which featured in studies of Hollywood remakes of French films of the 1980s (see Forrest & Koos 2002, Grindstaff 2002, Mazdon 2000). Elsewhere, work which reflects the trend for America remaking its own horror cinema has begun to emerge. In addition to Shane Borrowman's *Dawn of the Dead* study in *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation* discussed above, Craig Frost (2009) has written on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, arguing that the rewriting of the narrative for a new version negates the understanding and appreciation of the original and to some extent reduces its status for audiences. *Chainsaw* is included in Ryan Lizardi's (2010) analysis of slasher remakes which addresses what he interprets as an enhanced emphasis on hegemonic misogyny; the film is again used (among others) for a comparative structural analysis in Andrew Patrick Nelson's 2010 essay 'Todorov's Fantastic and the Uncanny Slasher Remake'. In the same

book, Tony Perrello (2010) focuses on ocular horror in director Alexandre Aja's films, including his remakes *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Mirrors*. A number of these essays provide a valuable resource when addressing particular (pairs of original and remade) films, but again they are limited in offering broader discussion and analysis which situates the films within their own contexts.

Additional Literature: Horror and Beyond

At a broader level, academic discussions of the industry trend for remaking horror cinema seem entwined with those negative, usually highly cynical critical reactions to both the practice of adaptation and the films themselves (see Gilbey 2007, Kermode 2003, Macaulay 2005, Newman 2004 & 2009 for examples; indeed, this is often evident in individual case studies as well, as apparent in the very brief descriptions of Frost and Lizardi's essays above, as well as in Francis' book). Recently published studies of horror cinema more generally either align views of remaking alongside these cynical debates, or (more commonly) ascribe the practice with barely a cursory mention (see Cherry 2009: 129, Odell & LeBlanc 2007: 26-27, Kerswell 2010: 180-185 for further examples). Ian Conrich's introduction to his edited collection *Horror Zone* (2010) opens with a list of recent remakes of genre films, suggesting that 'any reflection on the drive of the contemporary horror film for establishing remakes could conclude that the genre is saturated, imitative, and lacking progression', before moving straight on to a discussion of seemingly more respectable genre offerings (Conrich 2010: 1). Steffen Hantke's opening chapter to *American Horror Film: the Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* (2010) is even more scathing, using the example of a 'mindless series of remakes' that followed the postmodern irony of films like Wes Craven's *Scream* as representative of American horror film 'at its worst'. Excerpts from this introduction again read similarly to negative reviews, Hantke talks of Hollywood 'lowering its sights' and suggests that:

nothing seems safe from the greedy hands of studio executives out for a quick remake: George Romero was targeted with a remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (Zach Snyder 2004),

Carpenter by Rob Zombie with a remake of *Halloween* (2007), and Hitchcock became fair game too [...] at what must be considered the bottom of the slump, even remakes of remakes are possible now. (Hantke 2010: x-xi)

Describing original films as being 'targeted' or 'fair game' for remakers suggests a view not dissimilar from those early adaptation studies which privileged source material and implied that to adapt was almost an affront to the respectability and memory of those cherished texts. Furthermore, Hantke's erroneous inclusion of a 2004 remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (Snyder's film was a relatively well received 'reimagining' of *Dawn of the Dead*) could be understood as symptomatic of the disdain or even disinterest toward remakes. Even his later and more productive observation that 'it is simply good business to capitalise on a general awareness of material that does not have to be created from scratch in costly advertising campaigns, minimising the risk of commercial failure and translating this element of predictability into easy marketability' (Hantke 2010: xvi) suggests that the only way to understand these new versions is within the context of industry, thus ignoring any other factors. While there are a number of recent publications on horror cinema which cover the last decade, then, there is a definite lack of serious academic attention to the practice of remaking horror films in Hollywood within these works.

In addition to these recent publications which address trends in contemporary genre cinema, there is a vast resource of past academic work on the horror film, addressing numerous subgenres and case studies of individual films from various theoretical, historical and production perspectives, many of which inform this study at some level. These will be useful in considering both the original texts and their remakes within their respective cultural, social and political contexts, and in analysing both sets of films comparatively, giving consideration to not only what has changed between versions, but more importantly how and why. These studies are too numerous to discuss in their entirety, but include (although are by no means limited to) work by Robin Wood (1979, 1986), Noel Carroll (1990), Andrew Tudor (1989, 1997), Carol Clover (1992), Mark Jancovich (1994, 2002), Paul Wells (2000), Gregory Waller

(1987), Charles Derry (1987), Mark Bould (2003), Reynold Humphries (2002), Peter Hutchings (2004), Linnie Blake (2002), Brigid Cherry (2002, 2009), David Church (2006), Richard Nowell (2011), Matt Hills (2005a), and Kevin J. Wetmore (2012).

More detailed discussions of the key works on genre cinema which are used in the chapters which follow are better positioned within the chapters themselves; this will provide full contextualisation of my own arguments and relate them to existing studies to show how they contribute to knowledge in the field. In short here, however, it is worth briefly outlining which studies are used and how they are applied. In considering the attempts of the production company Platinum Dunes to restart key horror franchises (chapter 4), I draw from new academic work on the film 'reboot' by William Proctor (2012), and on franchise adaptation by Claire Parody (2011). Proctor's essay elaborates on the concept of rebooting popular franchises, noting how new texts establish origin stories and protagonists' 'beginnings' – an argument that can be made of the remakes *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Parody's essay, meanwhile, is useful in offering a counter argument to the suggestion that adaptations negate the cultural memory of their origins. Chapter 5 of this thesis offers a detailed analysis of the distinctions between remakes of slasher films from the late 1970s and early 1980s. There is a wealth of literature on the original cycle (Dika 1987, Modleski 1987, Trencansky 2001 included), but especially useful for my discussion is the work of Richard Nowell (2011), and Peter Hutchings (2004). Nowell's book *Blood Money* is the first academic treatment of the slasher's historical and industrial contexts, and it identifies key trends and movements within the cycle. In *The Horror Film*, Hutchings argues that slashers are more productively considered by examining and understanding the differences between the films and their contributions to generic evolution, rather than strictly focusing on their connections and similarities. I use this approach to initiate a study of slasher remakes that emphasises their diversity and creativity and shows how they represent developments within horror cinema.

Chapter 6 considers how a number of horror films produced in the 1970s have been collectively subsumed in discussions of a politically engaged, radical genre cinema which reflected the socio-political tensions of the time of its making (Wood 1979/1986, Sharrett 1984, Derry 1987, Waller 1987, Crane 1994, Jancovich 1994, Humphries 2002, among others). I assess the relevance of these studies, as well as comparable work by Linnie Blake (2002), Kevin J. Wetmore (2012) and Shane Borrowman (2009), who propose equivalent allegorical readings of remakes of these films, which they argue represent the contemporary concerns of post-9/11 American society. Finally, chapter 7 utilises feminist studies of rape-revenge films, including Carol J. Clover's seminal *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992) and Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to compare and contrast the female protagonists of *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Last House on the Left*. Here, I also draw from discussions of 'torture-porn'⁸ (including those by Jeremy Morris [2010] and Adam Lowenstein [2011]) to argue that changes between versions are the necessary result of updating a film to reflect recent genre trends in order to appeal to contemporary audiences.

While this study is not structured around issues of horror fandom and how fans specifically respond to remakes of cherished originals (indeed, such work is outside the scope of this project and would itself require significant research to cover the topic in sufficient depth), I do address audience reception in addition to critical responses. From this perspective, studies of fandom – particularly those within cult film studies (as it so often addresses genre cinema) – inform my research, and I should acknowledge such work here, even though it is not applied in depth within the following discussions. As cult film is so frequently defined as such by its devoted following, it is unsurprising that many academic studies of cult discuss, at least in part, fandom. Discourses of consumption, audience studies and fan practices are common in a large number of seminal essays, articles, journals and readers on cult film (for examples, see Telotte 1991, Austin 1981, Corrigan 1991, Grant 2000, Jerslev

⁸ The term 'torture porn' was coined by the critic David Edelstein in 2006. He applied it to a particular type of horror film that had emerged in the mid-2000s (for example, *Hostel* and *Saw*) which featured graphic, visceral scenes of torture and suffering. The term has since entered the common critical vocabulary –but as I argue in chapter 7, it is problematic.

1992, Mathijs and Mendik 2008, among many others) – but the focus here should be on those texts which concentrate closely and specifically on fan practices.

Many of these studies focus on subcultural capital as an important feature of cult fandom. John Fiske (1992) defines fans as both producers and users of cultural capital; and identifies three characteristics of fandom – ‘Discrimination and Distinction’ (how fans define their fandom and exclude others from it) (Fiske, 1992: 448), ‘Productivity and Participation’ (the construction of social identity through cultural commodity) (Fiske, 1992: 450), and ‘Capital Accumulation’ (the accumulation of knowledge and the collection of objects and memorabilia) (Fiske, 1992: 452-453). Nathan Hunt describes trivia as an important currency of fandom, the possession of which ascribes a fan with cultural capital (Hunt 2003) (which goes some way towards understanding the appeal of Koetting’s book to horror fans). Similarly, in her study of fan interaction on websites dedicated to discussion of ‘video nasties’ of the 1980s, Kate Egan observes how fans act as collectors, historians, and subcultural teachers, asserting their authority as authentic fans and experts through the exchange of information as subcultural capital (Egan 2001). Mark Jancovich also discusses subcultural capital, identifying it not as a tool with which to assert authority and expertise over other fans, but as a method ‘to produce a clear sense of distinction between the authentic subcultural self and the inauthentic mass cultural other’ (Jancovich 2008: 155). Jancovich’s discussions of the cultist’s self-distinction and opposition to the mainstream, and the methods they use to mark this difference, are particularly useful when considering reactions of fans of the original films to their respective remakes.

In his influential essay ‘Get A Life!: Fans, Poachers, Nomads’ (1992), Henry Jenkins argues that fans’ transgressive tastes are commonly seen as a threat to dominant social order, and fan culture an ‘open challenge to the “naturalness” and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authority and a violation of intellectual property’ (Jenkins 1992: 433). For these reasons, fan culture is marginalised and represented as ‘Other’ in order to avoid

the disruption of 'sanctioned culture' (Jenkins 1992: 433). Rather than accepting this view of fandom, Jenkins successfully challenges the stereotypical conception of fans as 'cultural dupes, social misfits and mindless consumers', instead arguing that fandom involves participation, and fans are 'active producers and manipulators of meanings' (Jenkins 1992: 433); assertively appropriating texts to serve their own interests and produce their own related texts – what Jenkins refers to as 'textual poaching' (Jenkins 1992: 434). Jenkins's essay provides an ideal model for seriously considering fan cultures; and in this case, for specifically considering the fandom of the original films and the participation of fans as part of a community (especially online). Finally, Matt Hills's work is also relevant. Hills's 2002 book *Fan Cultures* is a comprehensive study of fan culture and academic theories on fandom, which draws examples from particular groups of fans (for example, fans of *Star Trek*, *The X-Files* and Elvis Presley). Hills's discussion of cult discourses within fan culture, cult fandom as neoreligiosity (Hills 2002: 117), the interaction of fans with cult texts (Hills 2002: 22) and the idea that a text's cult status is not defined by a following, but by (among other factors) its 'uniqueness' (Hills 2002: 143), can all be applied to understand both the cult status of the original films and the reactions of those films' fans to the remade versions.

In addition to the literature highlighted in this review, there are a number of further published resources which will be used throughout this study. Analysis of a large range of previews, reviews, and other paratexts and ancillary discourses surrounding both the original films and the remakes, in the popular press as well as academic journals, will be essential in assessing critical reaction to the films. Discussions on horror websites such as *Fangoria*, *Dread Central* and *Bloody Disgusting* are also relevant, as are reader comments on their respective forums. This review is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all of the texts which will inform this study. Rather, it is a review of the critical literature which it is hoped will not only provide essential theoretical frameworks for required discussion and analysis, but also the direction for further research. By combining the more recent approaches to remaking – notably, those

effectively pioneered by Constantine Verevis and theoretically furthered by Zanger, Lukas and Marmysz – with progressive work in adaptation studies (Stam, Hutcheon, Leitch); horror remakes from the last ten years can be considered within their own contemporary generic, cultural and socio-political contexts, and serious attention can be given to an area that, strangely for such a significant industry trend, has so far been largely ignored in academic studies of horror cinema.

Chapter 3: Horror, Remakes and Adaptation: Defining and Defending the Horror Remake

The recent raft of horror remakes can be grouped in a number of cycles or collections which contribute to an understanding that, instead of focusing solely on a singular film's connection with an original film, considers them also as valid contributions to the evolution of the genre, and as texts worthy of study in their own right. In later chapters, I will consider a number of these groups (franchise reboots, slasher remakes, new versions of American horror films of the 1970s, and rape-revenge narratives) and their place in contemporary horror cinema; but before moving onto these specific studies, there are a number of theoretical debates around remaking which warrant further, detailed discussion. This chapter positions the film remake (and the process of remaking) alongside other contemporary forms of adaptation, and discusses horror remakes within the context of issues surrounding this. Understanding remaking as part of a much wider current tendency toward cultural recycling, and interrogating issues such as categorisation and fidelity (exhausted in Adaptation Studies but largely unaddressed in work on the remake) is essential if we are to move on to understand specific examples of how and why Hollywood has propagated the horror remake and how audiences might make sense of both the trend and the particular films it has produced.

Remaking is often only perfunctorily mentioned in studies of adaptation, in attempts to exhaustively list the multitude of intertextual possibilities for cultural repetition and recycling. For every progressive approach which acknowledges (albeit only in passing) the film remake as a mode of adaptation (e.g. Hutcheon 2006:170), so other studies refute the suggestion of remaking as adaptation 'proper', citing differences in approaches to retelling, or the motivations for production, as marking them apart from other reworkings. Even those most dynamic studies which have come to shape the field largely neglect remaking. Perhaps its omission is not deliberate, but its exclusion speaks volumes:

Adaptation theory by now has available a well-stocked archive of tropes and concepts to account for the mutation of forms *across media*: adaptation as reading, rewriting, critique, translation, transmutation, metamorphosis, recreation, transvocalization, resuscitation, transfiguration, actualization, transmodalization, signifying, performance, dialogization, cannibalization, reinvisioning, incarnation or reaccentuation (the words with the prefix “trans” emphasise the changes brought about in the adaptation, while those beginning with the prefix “re” emphasise the recombinant function of adaptation). (Stam, 2005a:25, emphasis added).

Apparent here, especially in light of Stam’s inclusion of terms such as ‘rewriting’, ‘recreation’ and ‘reinvisioning’, is the glaring exclusion of ‘remaking’ as a form of adaptation. Stam’s distinction that the process of adapting, however this occurs, takes place *across media*, is telling. Remaking as a specifically film-to-film process rather than a novel-to-film, comic-to-film, game-to-film or theme park ride-to film is seemingly problematic for adaptation scholars – it is the nature of the source format which prevents the remake, and remaking as a process, from being understood and appreciated as adaptation. Yet there is no finite reason why changes must take place across media in order for texts to be defined as adaptations. As Constantine Verevis suggests (2006: 82), it is the movement from written to cinematic signs that is most easily labelled as adaptation, but other, visual sources which are frequently adapted (television programmes, comic books, computer games) obscure that potential definition. Given that more recent work in the field has broadened its scope to include discussion of other media, the refusal to include other films alongside these seems at odds with the now common, more intertextual approach to adaptation, particularly when many of those literary sources discussed have themselves already been adapted multiple times (e.g. *Dracula*), making newer versions remakes by default (Verevis, 2006: 82). The reluctance to discuss remaking in the same terms as adaptation seems inexplicable, when a range of media are now considered, and intertextuality blurs the distinct boundaries between ‘original’ and ‘copy’.

This chapter addresses remaking as part of a much wider culture of adaptation, recycling, and repetition, beginning by discussing the remake as but

one example in an endless stream of allusion, parody, franchises and cycles within popular contemporary cinema and considering how genre, specifically horror, lends itself to remaking on this broad level. The intertextual nature within generic recycling means that categorising remakes and their defining details is, at best, difficult; recent examples of horror films pertaining to be sequels or prequels are used here as case studies to underline the elastic nature of remaking, and as evidence to support the suggestion that any taxonomy of the remake can never be entirely exhaustive. Finally, while not wishing to further already over-stressed debates surrounding fidelity, I acknowledge both the importance of faithfulness (or otherwise) for horror remakes' audiences, and suggest that, while futile, the nature of the argument is explicitly connected to the apparent pleasure of watching horror remakes, and is thus unavoidable. The suggestion that remaking is akin to adaptation does not require regurgitation of the key theories in the field with the word 'film' where 'novel' once was, but there are significant areas of debate which raise questions specific to remaking, and require some consideration if we are to move on to fully understand its processes and products.

Remaking, Repetition and Generic Recycling

The supposed market saturation by remakes of mainstream American (and especially Hollywood) cinema draws frequent complaints from critics and audiences alike. Cited as representing a lack of imagination and the ultimate evidence of industry greed, the glut of remakes since the turn of the century is begrudgingly discussed as a sadly dominant cinematic trend. In the summer of 2007, *Variety* reported that of 46 films scheduled for wide release in America that season, almost half were sequels or remakes of earlier films (Gilbey 2007). While still prominent, it appears that this number has, in recent years, more than halved. A study carried out in 2010 showed that, of all American films (defined by having both a USA release and production company) released that year, only 19% were sequels to or remakes of earlier releases, with just 7% remakes, and only 5% remakes of English language films. And yet, the same study suggests that remakes and sequels combined account for just under half of the

40% of releases in 2010 which were based on existing sources – books (still the prominent choice for adaptors at 19%), plays, myths and legends, comics, video games and television (Harwood 2011).

That only 60% of mainstream releases in 2010 were based on an original screenplay underlines the propensity for recycling in Hollywood cinema, and the general compulsion towards repetition within contemporary culture. The endless appeal of retelling stories, for studios at least, includes the comparatively low cost involved in producing a film based on an existing property, where much of the creative processes involved in pre-production are already in place, the 'tried-and-tested' nature of a remake which will appeal to an existing audience, and the potential to revive a flagging franchise or create new cross-media profit opportunities through merchandising (Verevis 2006: 37-38). Audiences, meanwhile, may relish being told that same story countless times, for reasons of familiarity ('there's nothing like buying into a story that you're sure you already like, especially if you've grown to love the characters' [Cox 2012]), and as "retromania" feeds an appetite for cultural archaeology' (Cox 2012).

Remaking is clearly only a small factor within a much wider cinematic obsession with repetition, and even then is only one example of film-to-film adaptation. Sequels and prequels further expand franchise narratives, or franchises can be 'rebooted' from scratch when they become stale or unsuccessful (see chapter 4 for detailed discussion). As in the case of *The Amazing Spider-man* (Marc Webb, 2012), studios may even restart a franchise in order to hold on to a particular property; released only five years after Sam Raimi's *Spider-man 3* (2007), Webb's reboot was produced by Sony in an effort to retain the rights to the superhero character, which would otherwise revert back to Marvel (Baron 2012, Cox 2012). Popular characters might inspire spin-off films which promote them to protagonist and expand their own narratives (*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, Nicholas Stoller, 2008 / *Get Him to the Greek*, Nicholas Stoller, 2010, *Shrek*, Andrew Adamson & Vicky Jensen, 2001 / *Puss In Boots*, Chris Miller, 2011, *Knocked Up*, Judd Apatow, 2007 / *This Is 40*, Judd Apatow, 2012). Films can also be set within the existing 'world' of another film

or franchise without providing the direct narrative link of a sequel or prequel. *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott 2012), for example, is set in the same universe as the director's earlier *Alien* (1979) films, and explains much of the origins of the *Alien* story world. Yet Ridley Scott decreed that the film should not be seen as a prequel. In an interview with Mark Kermode, Scott states: 'If there was a sequel to this, which there might be if the film is successful, there'll be two more of these before you even get to *Alien 1*', which does place *Prometheus*' narrative before, if not immediately prior to the events of *Alien*; but when asked to confirm the film is not a prequel, he states 'absolutely not', providing an authorial and therefore authoritative understanding for his audience (Scott 2012).

There are further examples of intertextual, adaptive film-to-film formats. A number of films can co-exist and crossover within a self-contained narrative universe, like Marvel's superhero films (*Iron Man & Iron Man 2*, Jon Favreau 2008, 2010, *The Incredible Hulk*, Louis Leterrier, 2008, *Thor*, Kenneth Branagh, 2011, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Joe Johnston, 2011) all of which culminate in the protagonists coming together for *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon, 2012). Cycles of cult films are based on similar concepts, such as the recent flood of low-budget, giant-monster-versus-monster films, including *Megashark vs. Giant Octopus* (Ace Hannah, 2009), *Megashark vs. Crocosaurus* (Christopher Douglas-Olen Ray, 2010), *Dinocroc vs. Supergator* (Jim Wynorski, 2010) and *Mega Python vs. Gatoroid* (Mary Lambert, 2011), or in a whole raft of 'Jawsploitation' movies (see Hunter 2009). Some direct-to-DVD titles capitalise on the notoriety or success of a mainstream release by blatantly exploiting it. One company in particular, The Asylum, specialises in 'mockbusters' (a term the studio's founders use themselves, see Breihan 2012) such as *Transmorphers* (Leigh Scott, 2007), *The Da Vinci Treasure* (Peter Mervis, 2006), and *Paranormal Entity* (Shane van Dyke, 2009). This practice of association is not new or unusual, of course – examples can be seen in the likes of Italian genre films that aligned themselves as sequels to American releases with which they had no connection (*Zombi 2*, Lucio Fulci, 1979, *Alien 2*, Ciro Ippolito, 1980). Parodies of particular genres or specific films,

meanwhile, exist in everything from the likes of *Scary Movie* (Keenen Ivory Wayans, 2000), *Date Movie* (Aaron Seltzer, 2006) and *Disaster Movie* (Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, 2008) to hardcore pornography, including a whole raft of horror porn ‘remakes’ such as *Porn of the Dead* (Rob Rotten, 2006), *The XXXorcist* (Doug Sakmann, 2006), *Texas Vibrator Massacre* (Rob Rotten, 2008) and *Evil Head* (Doug Sakmann, 2012) (see Watson 2013).

The huge variety of ways in which films, on some level, adapt other films – through sequels and prequels, rip offs and spin offs, parodies, and overt remakes – supports Robert Stam’s view of adaptation as a ceaseless, intertextual process (Stam 2005a: 31). This perpetual cultural borrowing ensures that, regardless of any final film’s potential merits, if it is based on or explicitly inspired by another film, it is not usually granted a similar prestige to that which may be awarded to an ‘original’ text. As a result, remakes are seen as derivative, imitative and belonging to an adaptive type with a somewhat ‘low cultural status’:

[...] the problem of sequels and remakes, like the even broader problem of parody & pastiche, is quite similar to the problem of adaptation [...] all these forms can be subsumed under the more general theory of artistic imitation, in the restricted sense of works of art that imitate other works of art [...] all the “imitative” types of film are in danger of being assigned a low cultural status, or even of eliciting critical opprobrium, because they are copies of “culturally treasured” originals. (Naremore 2000: 13).

Assertions such as Naremore’s, which clearly still aim to separate and distinguish film-to-film forms from other modes of adaptation only serve to further connect them through association; all can be included under the banner of ‘artistic imitation’, all are intertextual, all are ‘imitative’, and remakes are as prone to critical scorn as other adaptations.

Cinematic recycling at a broad level can be seen as a key part of a particular genre’s trends and evolution: ‘adaptation, much like genre itself, is a method of standardising production and repackaging the familiar within an economy of sameness and difference’ (Hunter 2009). Just as the appeal of

remakes lies in patterns of repetition and variation, so too do generic codes and conventions become recognisable by telling 'familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations' (Grant 1986: ix), and remain popular by both promoting this familiarity and displaying difference as genres evolve. The repetitive, cyclical nature of genre lends itself to adaptation, and vice versa; the relationship between the two is reciprocal, adaptation relies on familiarity with a particular genre's key themes, tropes and iconography while contributing to its evolution, offering new examples of differentiation or distinction. As an especially cogent generic form, and as an already typically low-budget genre, horror provides an appealing option for low-cost repetition and recycling, and it is unsurprising that horror has, historically, produced more remakes than any other genre in the last 20 years – 18% of its total output (Follows 2014).

While it is not true that contemporary horror cinema is entirely dominated by remakes, then, laments over their proliferation are not entirely unfounded. This, coupled with the genre's already denigrated cultural status, ensures discourse around horror remakes remains largely negative and disparaging, a clear example of the critical contempt imposed on 'imitative' adaptations as described by Naremore above. Remakes are often seen as a particularly low form of adaptation, and the horror remake perhaps the 'lowest of the low'. Of course, many of horror's tropes, themes and associated terminologies (zombification, cannibalisation, rebirth, resurrection, reincarnation, reanimation, life after death, etc.) both exemplify the adaptable nature of horror cinema and lend themselves to critics' vocabulary when describing their malaise over 'yet another' genre remake; texts are 'vampiric', old classics are 'cannibalised', storylines are 'dug up':

Horror movies are Hollywood's backlot of the living dead. No genre is more fond of replicating itself. Zombies, pod people, psychopaths, wolf-people – they love to breed. It's in their nature. Most promiscuous are serial killers, spawning serial franchises...but while slasher sequels generate the bulk compost in Hollywood's graveyard of recycled horror, the more intriguing experiments are remakes...the horror movie remake is hard-wired in the DNA of the genre, which exploits the fear of

something coming back to haunt us – whether from the grave, the asylum, or the basement. What we're most afraid of, after all, is not the unknown, which we can't begin to imagine, but a scary new prototype of the monster we've already come to know and hate (B.D. Johnson 2009).

The horror genre has, of course, spawned remakes, re-adaptations and re-versions throughout its cinematic lifespan. *Der Golem* was made three times by Paul Wegener between 1915 and 1920, and his film *The Student of Prague* (1913) was remade in 1926 (Henrik Galeen) and 1935 (Arthur Robinson), and as a short in 2004 (Spencer Collins & Ian McAlpin). *Dracula* has been made countless times since *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922) first adapted elements of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel. Universal recycled their Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, Wolf-man and the Mummy throughout the 1930s and 1940s - with contemporary remakes of *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999) and *The Wolfman*, and *Van Helsing* (Stephen Sommers, 2004) which brings together the studio's iconic monsters; in turn, Hammer resurrected the characters in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s in a competing cycle of 're-adaptations'. The 1980s saw horror remakes of 1950s science fiction films such as *The Fly* and *The Thing* (both now well regarded as definitive versions), and a cycle of supernatural remakes in the late 1990s and early 2000s pre-empted the boom of the last decade (*The Haunting*, *House on Haunted Hill*, *Thir13en Ghosts*). The horror remake is not remotely unprecedented. Furthermore, newer and 'original' entries in the genre rely on audience familiarity with the conventions of horror and its intertextual, adaptive nature – from the allusions to Japanese horror and the Italian cannibal film in Eli Roth's *Hostel* films (2005, 2007), or the self-reflexive nature of *Scream* to newer examples such as *Cabin in the Woods* and *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil* (Eli Craig, 2010) which employ metatextual approaches to bring the genre full circle.

The horror genre's propensity for repeating, referencing and remaking itself makes it the perfect example of the recycled nature of contemporary film. Furthermore, the horror genre provides a strong opportunity to consider remaking in its historical, social and political contexts. Monsters transfer from text to text, often representing the fears and concerns of the audience at the

time, and different cultural moments require, if not a different monster, then a different subtext. Understood as a mode of adaptation, instead of an exploitative commercial product, the contemporary horror remake can help us to comprehend how and why Hollywood so frequently favours adaptive models, and what this might mean for audiences in their response to the films. Approaching such an understanding, however, raises a number of further theoretical questions, which should be considered. The first of these relates to the problem of defining the remake, and the assumptions that this label implies. As the next section considers, remaking is a fluid, elastic concept which applies to a variety of adaptive styles, and precisely categorising the film remake is a near-impossible task.

Defining the Remake: Issues and Complications

Although clearly identified as a certain mode of retelling which belongs to an adaptive family, the remake is arguably neither easy to define any further than this, nor simple to distinguish from other forms of adaptation. At a very basic level, we can understand the remake as a film which is explicitly connected (usually via its title, and through legalities surrounding copyright) to a specific source which both acts as a 'retrospectively designated point of origin and semantic fixity' (Verevis 2006:21), and repeats particular tropes, themes, characters and narrative elements from that source text. Yet this definition is confused, firstly by 'unacknowledged' remakes – films which obviously derive a narrative structure from an earlier film without paying credit to said text or declaring their remake status. Not acknowledged on its release as a remake by the producers or in any promotional material, reviews pointed out the similarities between *Disturbia* (D.J. Caruso, 2007) and *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954): 'audiences with a modicum of film knowledge will quickly realise that *Disturbia* is a clear if uncredited remake of *Rear Window* [...] [Shia] LaBeouf is the ASBO equivalent of James Stewart [...] [it is] entertaining Hitchcock-lite' (Thomas 2007; see also French 2007, Gilbey 2007). In this example, further complexities surrounding such 'disguised' remakes were highlighted by a legal battle over copyright infringement. The trust that owned the rights to the 1942

short story on which Hitchcock's film was based filed a lawsuit against *Disturbia*'s production company Dreamworks for not openly acknowledging the supposed source or paying suitable compensation (Child 2008). The case was overruled, the judge noting that 'the main plots are similar only at a high, unprotectable level of generality' (in Brooks 2010), suggesting that, by legal definition at least, intertextuality does not automatically equate to adaptation.

The suggestion that singular allusions to particular shots, camera styles, or certain lines equates a form of remaking (Braudy 1998: 327) is somewhat overstated, and ultimately risks categorising *all* films as remakes if we are to understand all films as intertextual constructions of some sort, continually drawing influence and inspiration from an array of other texts. Yet Braudy's positioning of these allusions on an 'intertextual continuum' does provide a useful framework for understanding the variety of ways in which a film can be remade. From those disguised remakes such as *Disturbia*, or films which recognise their origin texts in name but make significant changes to character, plot, setting and so on (Steve Miner's *Day of the Dead* retains zombies, militia and features an underground bunker, but without its title would be difficult to identify as a remake of George A. Romero's film, with which it is discursively aligned by ancillary material), through to supposed 'shot for shot' remakes such as Gus van Sant's *Psycho* or Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (2007), the array of modes of remaking, and the way in which these can overlap, only serves to exemplify the difficulty in attempting any singular definition of 'the remake'.

Even 'shot for shot' remakes feature simple changes or additions which would invalidate any possibility of the remake being understood as a carbon copy of an earlier film, as opposed to an adaptation or interpretation of that source text. There is always some amount of originality involved in the adaptive process, and this is visible in even the most subtle differences between versions; no film can ever precisely replicate its origins. Recasting with different actors results in not only an inevitable change in physicality but also variations in voice, line delivery and intonation, mannerisms, interactions between characters, and so on. Thus, Naomi Watts' performance in 2007's *Funny*

Games means Ann appears more welcoming and less cold towards the two men who first visit, then invade her home, than the equivalent Anna (Susanne Lothar) of Haneke's 1997 version – a distinction marked only by her facial expressions, body language and perhaps her softer make-up and hairstyle. Setting a narrative in the present, rather than emulating the period of the earlier film, demands alteration to the *mise-en-scène* in order to avoid the inclusion of anachronistic costumes, props and settings. The destroyed portable house phone in *Funny Games* 1997 is replaced in 2007 for a mobile, and the scene where a character picks up a remote control to literally 'rewind' the film and thus change a turn of events visually appears more like the frame-by-frame search of a DVD than a video rewind. Subtle script changes may also be required to reflect a change in temporal setting, in order to adhere with contemporary cultural references and common expressions. Thomas Leitch's (2000) article '101 Ways to Tell Hitchcock's *Psycho* From Gus Van Sant's' details numerous occurrences of such changes within Van Sant's film, otherwise considered largely imitative, illuminating just how different supposedly 'identical' remakes can be from their source (it also details changes to many shots and differences in editing, rendering the 'shot for shot' label near redundant). Furthermore, a film maker may choose to expand on or add a scene which more explicitly addresses a previously implied meaning. Thus, in *Psycho* 1998 we see Norman (Vince Vaughn) masturbate while spying on Marion (Anne Heche) undressing, 'literalizing what the original had expressed metaphorically' (Leitch 2000).

While the nuances which exist across remaking make exact categorisation difficult, there are connections with other adaptive types which cause even further confusion. Seemingly simple distinctions between sequels, prequels and remakes have become blurred, despite attempts at scholarly definition. Linda Hutcheon considers remakes to be part of a collection of adaptive texts (albeit discussing them only cursorily) (2006: 170); simultaneously she rejects sequels and prequels, describing them as 'not really adaptations': 'there is a difference between never wanting a story to end [...] and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways' (Hutcheon

2006: 9). Carolyn Jess-Cooke further distinguishes the film sequel from other forms of cinematic recycling by recognising the complexities of narrative: ‘deriving from the Latin verb *sequi*, meaning “to follow”, a sequel usually performs as a linear narrative extension, designating the text from which it derives as an “original” rooted in “beforeness” (Jess-Cooke 2009: 3). Sequels and prequels are not normally understood as adaptations *per se* in the way in which remakes can be; these films act as extensions (in either temporal direction) of a story, not alternate versions of the same story. Yet this seemingly obvious clarification is confused by films which merge the narrative continuation of a particular, pre-existing property with the retelling of elements of its plot, repetition of key scenes or other obviously recycled references – films which, although categorised as or purporting to be pre/sequels, could be identified to some extent as remakes.

John Carpenter’s *The Thing* begins with a confrontation between members of an American research crew stationed in the Antarctic, and two frantic, near-hysterical Norwegians who arrive at the American base in a helicopter, in pursuit of a dog they are trying to kill. In the confusion (language barriers prevent communication) one of the visitors accidentally shoots a member of the American team, and is himself shot in retaliation. In the ensuing panic, the helicopter explodes, also killing the pilot. Protagonist MacReady (Kurt Russell) and Copper (Richard Dysart) head to the Norwegian camp to investigate. On arrival, they find its crew members dead, and a grotesque burnt part-man-part-creature ‘thing’ which they take back to their own camp. Back at base, the Norwegians’ husky, taken in as a stray by the team, transforms into a tentacled creature and proceeds to attack the other dogs. Autopsies and experiments reveal that the eponymous Thing is in fact an alien life form which consumes, mimics and assimilates any being it attacks, and the rest of the film plays out as a ‘whodunit’ as the crew members gradually get taken over.

The 2011 prequel, also simply called *The Thing*,⁹ explains the fate of the Norwegian crew, detailing events which take place only days prior to the opening of the 1982 film. Acting as Jess-Cooke's 'narrative extension' to Carpenter's film, van Heijningen's *The Thing* explores the origins of the alien creature able to assimilate and mimic a human host/victim (or rather, it explains how the thing came to be discovered and 'released' upon the unsuspecting crew). It features numerous visual references to the first film, carefully (re)creating what will become the abandoned, post-carnage camp that MacReady and Copper explore (see Figure 2). Colin (Jonathan Walker) slits his throat in one version to avoid being overtaken by the *Thing* and is found frozen in the other, an axe is buried in a door in the 2011 film for MacReady to find in the later-set film, and the burnt Thing which the Americans find is revealed to be a spliced, mutated monster formed from two of the Norwegian crew, Edvard (Trond Espen Seim) and Adam (Eric Christian Olsen). Despite the narrative elements which anticipate the events of Carpenter's film, however, much of *The Thing* 2011 plays out as a recreation of events in the 1982 film. Once palaeontologists Kate (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and Adam arrive in Antarctica to research the frozen alien being discovered by the Norwegians, the plot unfolds in a remarkably similar way to that of Carpenter's *The Thing*. A dog is the first organism to be infected in both versions; there are noticeably similar characters (with comparable demises) across the films; a primitive test to check the crew for signs of being 'infected' by examining their fillings (the Thing is incapable of replicating inorganic matter) recollects (or pre-empt, if we consider the films' narratological order) the blood tests conducted on the crew of the 1982 version.

⁹ The decision not to give the prequel a 'colon title' (e.g. *The Thing: The Beginning*) was taken by the producers as they felt this would be 'somehow less reverential' to the original (see podcast at <http://www.spill.com/Podcasts/Listen.aspx?audioId=13>).



Figure 2: Setting the scene in *The Thing* (2011) for discovery in *The Thing* (1982)

The overall effect is that the narrative of Carpenter's film is essentially retold and bookended with exposition to warrant the film's positioning and promotion as a prequel. This is most obvious in the inclusion of a final scene, intercut with the end credits, which shows the Norwegians' dog escaping and a subsequent helicopter chase, leading to the American camp of Carpenter's film and ending at the very point where the 1982 film begins. Further references to the 1982 version are evident in the use of elements of Ennio Morricone's original score, the images used on the posters and DVD covers, and in the film's animatronic special effects; despite complaints of overuse, CGI was used sparingly, and primarily to 'blend' the model effects (*The Thing Evolves*).

Early trade press reports of a new version of Carpenter's film made reference to the project as a remake (Fleming, 2006) and, even once it was clear the intention was to produce an origin story, a 're-imagining' (Fleming,

2009).¹⁰ Upon its release, reviewers drew attention to the way in which the film appeared, in many ways, to be derivative of Carpenter's version to the point of more closely resembling a remake than a prequel:

And therein lies the biggest issue...it asks us to believe that the same sequence of events could happen to two groups of similar people, all within a short time span (a few days) [...] Even the end credit sequence – which directly connects this film to the opening scene of Carpenter's – feels like a heavy-handed contrivance meant to remind us (in case we forgot) that this was a prequel, and not a remake. But again, like *The Thing* itself, it's hard to make that distinction just by looking (Outlaw, 2011).

The problem for a number of critics was that, in striving for reverence to the 1982 film, the prequel ended up imitating, rather than originating, any story of its own, emulating characters and mimicking scenes, and ironically opening itself up for criticism of the very thing its alien subject is guilty of:

The Thing is a curious experiment which, when viewed in relation to its predecessor, perhaps unwittingly assumes the form of its grotesque, shape-shifting subject; attaching itself to it, copying it and hiding inside it, either afraid or unable to come out and fully exist as its own distinct entity (A. Clark 2011; see also Patrick 2011, Neumaier 2011, Outlaw 2011).

Observations like this resulted in the film being described as a 'premake' in numerous reviews and online discussions (see for example 'The Arrow' 2011, C. Clark 2011, 'Uncle Creepy' 2011). Linguistically speaking, it is easy to see how this neologism provided a convenient label for discussing and understanding the film, both connoting a sense of beforeness as per 'prequel', and providing an irreverent rhyming riff on the 'remake'. However, it is an unsuitable construction in this context if we take the most logical interpretation of the word. 'Premake' is more likely to describe the action of making something in advance, and as such does not best lend itself to discussing adaptations in this sense, where a source, origin or inspirational text already exists. Yet it is a

¹⁰ The project had been mooted for some years before van Heijningen's version went into production. In 2004, *Variety* reported that Frank Darabont was to produce a four hour remake for the SyFy channel (Dempsey, 2004).

curious term which evidences a desire for continual categorisation of ever-merging narrative units and new forms of adaptation.

Regardless of its eventual mediocre reception, the filmmakers strived to both align the new version respectfully with Carpenter's film and simultaneously differentiate it, acknowledging in early promotion at New York's ComicCon 2010 that 'it was very important "not to paint a mustache on the Mona Lisa"' (Collura 2010). The credits acknowledge the source material for adaptation as the 1938 John W. Campbell Jr. novella *Who Goes There?*, at once rejecting its position as a remake of Carpenter's version, but also suggesting its narrative 'beforeness', and thus attempting to clearly define its status as a prequel to the 1982 film.

The categorisation of van Heijningen's film becomes even more complex when considering the intertextual, multi-platform nature of *The Thing's* wider narrative world. Campbell's novella provided inspiration for the 1951 film *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby). Carpenter's film is often considered as a remake of this version, but features a plot more closely resembling the short story (as well as its characters), and was released six years after a comic book adaptation of Campbell's story appeared in *Starstream*. A novelisation (Foster 1982) of Bill Lancaster's screenplay was released the same year as Carpenter's film. Events following the denouement of the 1982 version were depicted in four series of comics from Dark Horse between 1991 and 1994, and in a 2002 video game (also called *The Thing*). In 2011, a month prior to the US release of van Heijningen's film, Dark Horse released a digital comic for free via its website which acted as a 'prequel to the prequel', unleashing the Thing onto a Norse village in ancient Greenland. In addition to these media which provide narrative expansion, alternate versions of the story are also created (see for example Peter Watts' Hugo award winning short told from the Thing's perspective or Lee Hardcastle's short claymation film with cats replacing the

humans); theme park attractions, toys and other ancillary merchandise, and video ‘mash-ups’¹¹ further contribute to *The Thing*’s universe.

These numerous versions, spin-offs and retellings, alongside merchandising and promotion, highlight how the 2011 film exists as but one text among many which contribute to a broad narrative, temporally spanning centuries in fiction, and decades in reality; it cannot simply be assigned a position of ‘prequel to’, or ‘remake of’, any single one of those texts. Furthermore, the multimedia platform nature of the contributing texts also confuses the issue of categorisation. In what is discussed in primarily filmic terms, it is difficult to understand a video game as a sequel to a film, and a comic as its prequel. Yet it is important to acknowledge that this kind of narrative extension beyond a singular film is commonplace – particularly within comics, novels and video games – and frequently forms both a commercial franchising strategy for property owners or rights holders, and an immersive, expansive narrative world for audiences to engage with in as much depth or detail as they please:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption (Jenkins 2008: 97-98).

The Thing is perhaps not the ideal example of multiplatform/transmedia storytelling as described by Henry Jenkins. As he acknowledges, the most popular (and profitable) instances often feature simultaneous (or close) releases of instalments across various media, and are controlled by a single ‘creative

¹¹ the cast of Carpenter’s film react with disdain to the prequel:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYjDVCwKr6A>

unit' (such as *Star Wars*, or *The Matrix* franchises) (see Jenkins 2008: 108). Yet *The Thing* illustrates the way in which 'worldbuilding' occurs through the introduction of new narrative instalments across numerous forms, and further highlights the issues which arise in looking at an 'original' film and its 'remake' in isolation, outside of any wider franchise context – including the problem of defining one singular text solely in relation to its connection with another.

Further problems surrounding definition arise when a film is purposely constructed to raise questions regarding its status. *Scream 4* (stylised as *Scre4m*) (Wes Craven, 2011) is titled with a clear numerical indicator of its position in the *Scream* series, marking it as a sequel which follows the third instalment (Wes Craven, 2000), and its plot accordingly follows on from the conclusion of the original trilogy. Series protagonist Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) returns to her hometown on the tenth anniversary of a series of brutal murders (the subject of the first film) which have become almost legendary among local teens, who celebrate it in Halloween-esque style. She is reunited with fellow survivors and now married couple Gale (Courtney Cox) and Dewey (David Arquette), and soon enough it appears that her return has attracted a copycat 'Ghostface' killer (Dane Farwell). The inclusions of familiar characters, and details of their evolved relationships and careers, combined with the Ghostface murders' infamy among local residents and the acknowledgment of their anniversary, clearly align events as following on from the earlier films.

Yet the film is also, to some extent, framed as a remake, in an approach which is typical of the postmodern, genre-reflexive franchise to which it belongs (see Jess-Cooke 2009: 58, Wee 2005 & 2006, among others, for discussion). *Scream* sets out to deconstruct the slasher film 'formula', observing, subverting, and simultaneously paying homage to archetypal genre characters and situations, most notably in film geek Randy's (Jamie Kennedy) assertion that "there are certain rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie" (no drinking, no drugs, no sex) - rules ignored by his friends, many of whom inevitably end up as victims. The dialogue consistently brings to

the fore the self-referential nature of the series, and the irony of the characters' situations ("No, please don't kill me, Mr. Ghostface, I wanna be in the sequel", "Why can't I be in a Meg Ryan movie? Or even a good porno"). *Scream 2* (Wes Craven, 1997) draws attention to its sequel status (Randy's 'rules' this time including a higher body count and more elaborate death scenes), while the third instalment is identified within the diegesis as the concluding chapter in a trilogy.

With more than a decade passed since *Scream 3* (which, constructed as part of a trilogy, had not left an open ending), perhaps the most logical (and culturally relevant) direction for a fourth film in the series to take was to situate itself as a remake. The film begins with a pre-credit sequence in which two teenage girls, after bemoaning the current state of the horror genre ("it's not scary, it's gross...I hate all that torture porn shit") are stalked and killed by two Ghostface killers. The scene is revealed to be the opening of *Stab 6*, the latest instalment of a fictional series which exists within the diegesis of *Scream*, initially based on the 'real life events' of the first film. A cut to a new scene shows the reaction of Rachel (Anna Paquin) watching:

"[...] the death of horror, right here in front of us...it's been done to death; the whole self-aware, postmodern meta-shit [...] these sequels just don't know when to stop, they just keep recycling the same shit [...] it's so predictable, there's no element of surprise, you can see everything coming."

Her friend Chloe (Kristen Bell) responds to her complaints by producing a knife and stabbing her in the stomach ("did *that* surprise you?" she asks) before the scene ends by *again* revealing itself to be the beginning of yet another *Stab* sequel. Two friends discuss the complexities of the 'film-within-a-film' trick ("I don't get it...if *Stab 6* is actually the beginning of *Stab 7*..."), and reveal that, while the 'original trilogy' of *Stab* films were based on real-life events (presumably those seen in the original *Scream* trilogy), later instalments took increasingly absurd directions ("time-travel, that was the stupidest") after Sidney "threatened to sue". This opening sequence homages the first film's beginning and continues a series trend for elaborate, pre-credits establishing sequences, representing the most convoluted idea from across the four films.

Simultaneously it mocks, and actively promotes, the 'self-aware, postmodern meta-shit' for which *Scream* is renowned; while diegetically positioning itself as a superior alternative in a genre flooded with 'torture porn shit' and sequels which 'just don't know when to stop'.

Scream 4 continues to follow the patterns of variation and repetition identifiable (and supposedly appealing) in remakes. A new group of teenagers, led by Sidney's cousin Jill (Emma Roberts), are largely presented as equivalents of *Scream*'s friends, but reverse expectations by revealing Jill and Charlie, characters with the most innocent of original counterparts (Sidney and Randy) to be the killers. Scenes similar to those in the original film are 'bigger and better', such as the first opening, which mimics the equivalent from *Scream* but with two victims and two killers, rather than one. Throughout the film, reference is made to the killer working to the 'rules' of a horror remake ("the original *Stab* structure is pretty apparent", "[he is] working on less of a shrequel and more of a screamake"), and the genre trend for remaking is repeatedly mentioned, one character even being tested on horror remake trivia by the killer, just as Casey (Drew Barrymore) was quizzed over the identity of killers in key horror franchises in the first film. The identifiable similarities and the marked differences between *Scream 4* and the films of the original trilogy play into both the deliberate, knowing intertextuality of Craven's series and the self-referentiality of the genre itself, and identify remaking as a flexible category of adaptation. *Scream 4* is both sequel and remake, and its refusal to definitively align itself with either label provides an example of the futility of such categorisations within modern adaptation.

Some studies of remaking have sought to clearly classify and define this particular adaptive type, to provide taxonomies and apply specific labels to indicate the variety of ways in which a film can be remade. Thomas Leitch proposes a supposedly 'exhaustive' list of four terms - readaptations, updates, homages, and true remakes (Leitch 2002) - and Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos talk of 'true' and 'false' remakes (2002). More recent approaches (such as Proctor, 2012), meanwhile, aim to identify the differences between remakes

and 'reboots' – the beginning anew of a film franchise or series, rather than the repetition of a particular, singular film (discussed in chapter 4). But none of these attempts can offer exact distinctions or precise categories for a practice which employs a range of adaptive approaches, many of which often overlap. There are now countless terms applied to remaking, not only in scholarly studies, but also by the press, fans, filmmakers and promoters alike. Remakes are no longer just 'remakes', but readaptations, reboots, reimaginings, reversions, revisions, rebirths; films are updated, rewritten, revamped and refranchised, reduxed and reinvented. Film criticism now has an expansive vocabulary of almost interchangeable terms which, rather than identifying clear differences between the types of processes by which texts are adapted, only serve to underline the proliferation of remaking and further confuse any potential for simplified categorisation of remakes.

We can understand all texts, by their nature, as intertextual, as Bakhtinian 'hybrid constructions' which not only reference, but combine and enter into dialogue with other texts; adaptation, therefore, is 'an orchestration of discourses, talents and tracks [...] mingling different media and discourses and collaborations' (Stam 2005: 9). Ultimately, if everything is so intertextually bound, there is often too much crossover, too many references and connections to other texts, to be able to clearly identify a film as a particular type of remake, and to ascribe a particular term to that type. Taxonomies are rendered nigh impossible by the myriad ways any one text adapts any other, capturing numerous intertextual references (to other films, their wider cycle or genre, pop culture, and so on) as it goes. Acknowledging that exact categorisation is a futile and unrewarding task is an important step in understanding remakes within their own rights. Adopting an approach which instead considers the remake within broader categories of industrial and textual contexts avoids the reduction of a film to a particular type, and allows for more productive discussion and analysis of production and reception. Before moving on to consider these aspects in more depth, however, there is one further broad

reception context which must be addressed – that of fidelity and its importance to audiences.

A Note on Fidelity: Favouring the Original

“You forgot the first rule of remakes, Jill. Don't fuck with the original” – Sidney, Scream 4.

In approaching any film, a level of viewer expectation is shaped in accordance with their understanding of a number of factors. The codes and conventions of a particular genre, a star personae, the style associated with a certain director, screenwriter or cinematographer, and promotion and reviews of any new release, all contribute to a ‘knowingness’ with which an audience enters the cinema. So too does the familiarity (or otherwise) with any source text. The understanding of a film as a remake affects audience expectation (and, in turn, potential acceptance) in a similar way – and arguably, understood as a new version of a familiar story, its status as a remake takes precedence over other factors in both its critical and audience reception. This is especially evident in reviews. Even a cursory glance over collected excerpts from reviews by both critics and audiences on websites like *Rotten Tomatoes* show how reactions to recent mainstream films such as *Total Recall* (Len Wiseman, 2012) or *Robocop* (José Padilha, 2014) are largely framed within comparisons to original versions. For example: ‘This Robo-reboot tries fiercely to update the satirical punch and stylistic perversity of Paul Verhoeven's 1987 original. It's a futile gesture’, ‘I'll take the original any day, but this is still fun, and the cast is first-rate’, ‘this re-vamp offers entertainment to a degree [...] however the movie doesn't excite the senses, average re-boot’, ‘I'm a big fan of the original [...] This new one takes itself very seriously. That's not good’.¹²

The notion that a remake should be viewed and considered within its own right as a stand-alone film, artistically or thematically independent from its

¹² See <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1200731-robocop/> and http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/total_recall_2012/

source text, is rendered impossible by its very labelling as a remake. Acknowledging the relationship between 'original' and 'copy' at any point during a film's conception, production or distribution (be this as a deliberate promotional ploy, or the result of legal obligations relating to copyright) makes comparisons between versions inevitable: 'when we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works' (Hutcheon 2006: 6). Even in instances where a viewer is unfamiliar with a source text, reference to the new version as a remake automatically creates a set of assumptions regarding its potential merits (or otherwise), reflecting on a common critical consensus of remaking as a cannibalistic and uninspired process, and the remake itself as derivative and ultimately pointless. Film remakes do deserve, and should be given, independent consideration within their own contexts. Yet no film exists within a vacuum, and, especially in the case of adapted texts, any attempt to understand or even to watch a new version in total isolation from its source is ultimately futile.

Comparisons between versions are both symptomatic of and inescapably fuel a rhetoric of fidelity. As critics and audiences alike consider a film based on any source, an obvious point for evaluation becomes one of faithfulness; in observing how the two texts are alike, so too are their differences noted. Debates of fidelity surrounding remakes recall the problematic approaches to adaptation now largely rejected by scholars, yet still absolutely prevalent in film criticism and reception. It is not my intention here to revisit or dredge up those debates in depth, to offer arguments regarding their futility or suggest more fruitful approaches – earlier works both exhaust this ground and provide much of the framework for productive analysis in this study (see for example Ray 2000, Stam 2005a, Hutcheon 2006, Leitch 2007, among many others, as considered in chapter 2). Approaches (and not exclusively academic ones; critics and cine-literate audiences are also included here) to understanding novel-to-film adaptations have largely evolved beyond concerns over a film's faithfulness to its source text. Yet, when it comes to remakes, it is apparent that

fidelity is still a concern for viewers, and some consideration should be given to the associated issues.

Just as using loyalty as a measure of an adaptation's success (or its deviation from the source text as a mark of its failure) sustains an unquestioned superiority of literature over cinema, so too is an original granted privilege over its remake – not only in the semantic connotations contained within its terminology (as in, for instance, 'the original – and best!'), but also the temporal hierarchy awarded by the original film's 'coming first'. Indeed, the language used in describing the relationship between any text and its adaptation only serve to further cement their positions in this hierarchical relationship; 'source', 'original', 'first' all imply a definite, fixed point of initial inspiration for a version which may be as derivatively faithful as a 'copy', or as unfaithfully unlike as a 'reimagining'. The scope for adaptation in remaking, from a close and careful reproduction to a dramatically altered text, highlights a key problem with the use of fidelity as a benchmark for success: 'a "faithful" film is seen as uncreative, but an "unfaithful" film is a shameful betrayal of the original [...] the adapter, it seems, can never win' (Stam 2005: 8).

In the case of the remake in particular, a faithful film is frequently regarded as pointless in addition to 'uncreative' or derivative, a criticism most cross-media adaptations do not have to face (because, presumably, there is always a citable reason to tell a story again if it is told through a new format). This notion of pointlessness is especially apparent in many reviews of genre remakes; thus Haneke's English-language *Funny Games* is considered 'superfluous' (James 2008), potential viewers of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are warned in an otherwise mostly positive review: 'you'll have to overcome resentment towards this unnecessary remake before you can be properly terrorised' (Newman 2003), and *I Spit on Your Grave* is labelled 'completely pointless, like being in the *Guinness Book of Records* for eating a wheelbarrow of your own shit' (Glasby 2011). A Google search of 'unnecessary remake' or 'pointless remake' results in not only news and reviews of a number of specific films, but countless hyperbolic features which use remakes (often genre remakes) to lament a

perceived dearth of creativity in mainstream contemporary (usually American) cinema. In many instances, it is the practice of remaking itself, rather than any resulting films, which is labelled pointless, as evidenced by the outright rejection of versions not even in production:

[...] even if it hasn't been done, I must bring up *Rosemary's Baby* [Roman Polanski, 1968] for it would surely have made my Top Ten ['Pointless Remakes' list]. Simply imagining how painful that will be is enough for me. I don't even need to see it to call it pointless. ('MovieMaven').

Reasons cited for the production of remakes, the 'points' in defensive response to the accusations of 'pointlessness' (such as the opportunity to update a film or address its shortcomings, the ability to promote through name recognition and the appeal to familiar audiences, the possibility of bringing a new audience to an existing property, and the relatively cheap costs associated with producing a version of a story already established), are, it seems, not explanation or excuse enough to those who complain of an industry oversaturated with familiar, retold stories.

A dominant cause for complaint, next to the notion of remakes being unnecessary and predominantly commercial, is the idea of disavowal or disrespect, that a remake somehow negates the status of an original film, and the practice of remaking itself shows nothing but contempt for a cherished text. This is evident in those features discussed above (and indeed in MovieMaven's quote, where speculation alone is 'painful'), which frequently ask questions such as 'why are the 80s being so mercilessly exploited? [...] movie studios clearly lack respect for these 30-year-old classics' (Cook 2012); and begrudge '[...] the potential (likely) bastardization of something we hold dear (and, yes, of course the original is still out there; it's the principle of the thing)' (Beggs 2012). The use of terms like 'bastardization', 'cannibalisation', 'exploitation', and even the more extreme (but not infrequently seen) suggestion from fans that a particular remake 'raped my childhood',¹³ suggest that it is the potential to ruin an existing

¹³ 'George Lucas raped my childhood' is a meme used by *Star Wars* fans to embody their general disapproval of both the second trilogy, and the editing of the earlier films, but it has become more

film (or the associated memory of that film) that is a problem for audiences who reject the new versions. There is an implication that, rather than creating something new by taking a film as a point of initial inspiration, the process of adaptation involved in remaking affects the original in some way, that it actually changes, challenges or damages the earlier text, or even its economic potential. This, of course, is inaccurate:

adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise. (Hutcheon 2006:175)

A fidelity-focused critique of remaking, as with adaptation more broadly, arises in part from the prestige granted to certain original texts. A remake of a film which is seen to have a 'classic' status (awarded by general consensus or individual, personal preference) is likely to encounter complaints over any adaptation. Yet hypertextuality itself can shift a (hypo)text toward canonicity, and over time continuous adaptation creates the 'prestige of the original' (Stam 2005a: 31). While the example that Stam uses is that of Victorian novels, this theory can equally be applied to remakes of films which have come to define a particular time, genre, or cycle. A key example here would be *Psycho*, which, following an initial mixed critical response, was edged toward canonicity by repeated referencing, homage and re-versioning, Hitchcock's association with the emergence and popularisation of auteur theory, and its later influence on the genre's evolution; the film's status resulting in critical outrage to Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* remake (see Verevis 2006: 58-76 for a detailed discussion) – a version which would itself contribute to the prestige of Hitchcock's film.

This example shows how continuously adapting texts can in fact lead to their canonisation, or enhance the prestige they have already been awarded

common in discussion of remakes, late sequels, and reboots. See for example <http://www.facebook.com/michaelbaysux>, <http://www.voiceofcrazy.com/entertainment/robocop-the-latest-effort-of-hollywood-to-rape-my-childhood-again/>, <http://coyoterose.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/open-letter-stop-raping-my-childhood.html> among many more.

through various references. And yet, for many critics and audiences (fans, specifically), the remaking of a classic film is perhaps considered a step too far, a sacrilegious act which defames and disrespects the iconic status of the original. It could be suggested that, in expressing disappointment, or outright anger at the remaking of a much loved film, fans not only articulate their frustration, but also seek to further their own status or subcultural capital. Research on fandom has often considered the construction of fan self-identity through interaction with others; and the accumulation of subcultural capital and authority through knowledge and ownership (see for example Fiske 1992, Jenkins 1992, Hunt 2003, Hills 2005a, Hills 2005b), and the internet has become a forum for that interaction and accumulation, enabling widespread discussion among fans. Matt Hills (2005a) uses online forum discussions between American fans of the Japanese cult horror *Ringu* to consider the way in which fans view its remake as questioning the anti-mainstream, cult status of the original, applying a 'bias theory' – a temporal concept in which fans reiterate their preference for the original as opposed to the remake (and thus their status as a cultist) through discourses of 'first viewings' versus 'first viewers' (Hills 2005a: 163-166). Many fans, Hills observes, are quick to confirm that they not only saw *Ringu* before *The Ring*, but also that this first viewing took place prior to the release of the remake.

The 'bias theory' evident in the forum refers to a supposed tendency for viewers to prefer the version that they saw first. Hills suggests that fans of *Ringu* construct themselves as 'pre-mainstream' as opposed to 'anti-mainstream', and most do not see the remake as a threat to the cult status of the original; often, in fact, the remake is positively welcomed as it presents the opportunity for the original to become more widely distributed and available to previously 'uneducated' fans of *The Ring* (Hills 2005a: 163-164). This, however, seems a rare opinion when it comes to fans of genre films, and the idea that remaking can bring new stature (or even a new audience) to the original is usually dismissed on horror forums:

Most kids will not even know that this is a remake because they have forgotten about "the horror from long time ago" ('DeathBed', in 'My Bloody Valentine (Remake)' thread, *Bloody Disgusting*).

there are other remakes that I have found that destroy the original movie to the point that several "die hard" fans of the original no longer like the movie or its remake ('Freak123', in 'What's the Best Modern Remake You've Ever Seen' thread, *Bloody Disgusting*).

These suggestions are rarely met with anything other than emphatic agreement, yet very occasionally, fans of originals will acknowledge the pointlessness of the argument in which they are engaged:

[...] who cares what some kid that you don't know watches...the status of the original doesn't suffer because some person doesn't know what version to watch. The great originals are still great, the bad ones are still bad [...] everyone is making it out like some kid in Michigan is watching *The Haunting* remake and the original is shriveling up and wilting away, or that that same kid in his whole life will never ever ever ever know that there was an original movie out there [...] And while some horror fans are perched ever so dangerously on their high horse looking down their noses on things they are supposed experts on, maybe just maybe some of those people watching remakes are actually enjoying them. I know, I know perish that thought ('thedudeabides', in 'OK, Remakes – What the FUCK?!?! Horror Is *Dead*' thread, *Dread Central*).

Ultimately, any debate surrounding remakes which deliberately (or incidentally) functions to gain cultural capital and thus cement fan status can, of course, also be seen to play a part in the continual canonisation of an original text. It is the frequent discussion which draws attention to those much-loved films, and inevitably acquires them new, previously unfamiliar audiences.

The very notion of fidelity (or lack thereof) correlates directly to the appeal of remakes and the pleasure in watching them. Much of the charm of film adaptations for audiences stems from a pattern of repetition and variation, from combinations of familiarity and surprise (Hutcheon 2006: 4, Horton & McDougal 1998: 6). Replication and difference are intrinsically linked to fidelity. Audiences enjoy recognising elements of the source and lament the loss of

others, and with this in mind, they cannot help but compare the two versions and ascribe value and preference to one using its relationship to the other as a comparative model. Using faithfulness as a criterion for a remake's success is simultaneously pointless, unproductive, and totally unavoidable. In much the same way as we cannot watch a film we know to be a remake entirely independently of its source text, neither can the inevitability of comparison between the versions be avoided, and truly, Stam was right when he stated that the adapter can never win. Regardless of the inescapable tendency to compare, considering the closeness of one text to another only serves to simply observe that there *are* changes, and it is instead more productive to consider why, how and perhaps for whom those changes have been made. Fidelity is central to understanding the appeal (or otherwise) of film remakes, and in contextualising audience response – but it cannot be a primary approach for their analysis.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the pervading nature of the fidelity debate in both academic approaches to adaptation and (more importantly) critical and audience reception of the film remake only underlines the impossibility of specifying any kind of taxonomy which provides adequate labels for the multiple 'types' of remaking. The intertextual aspects of adaptation, the necessity of both similarity and difference in remade films, and the evolving nature of genre cinema ensure that, just as no remake can ever be identical to its source, no two remakes can ever be considered to adapt in exactly the same ways. Rather than solely considering a remake's merits or flaws in the context of its position as a successor to an original film, it is more productive to acknowledge remaking's dominance, examine its associated trends from both an industrial and reception perspective, and consider, in this instance, how the horror remake contributes to its contemporary genre.

This chapter has shown that not only can remakes be considered as adaptations and should be discussed within the same frameworks, but that doing so provides a better understanding of the form. The horror remake is too

frequently denigrated by critics for its supposedly derivative nature, yet such recycling is common across contemporary cinema, and the remake can be considered alongside sequels, prequels, spin-offs, exploitative rip-offs and parodies as an adaptive, intertextual form which not only alludes to other, earlier work but also combines such references and repetitions with distinctions and developments, helping to shape and evolve the genre. Furthermore, academic attempts to succinctly define the remake, or provide categories which distinguish its types, frequently fail – and not only because of the complex, intertextual nature of adaptation. Labelling a film as a ‘remake’, ‘reboot’ or ‘reimagining’ is a task that is more productively undertaken by both filmmakers and audiences. Designating a film such as *Prometheus* a ‘prequel’ because of a scholarly examination of its narrative ‘beforeness’ is ultimately pointless if its creator insists that it is ‘absolutely not’ a prequel. *Scream 4* might be interpreted as a remake by a genre-savvy audience, regardless of its positioning as a sequel. And the example of *The Thing* shows that sometimes it is audiences who make sense of a film’s definition; despite the producers’ assertions that it is a prequel, critic and fan reviews observed how it more closely resembled a remake and even coined a new term, premake, to make sense of it.

The reason discourses of fidelity remain not only dominant, but important, in a reception context is that for all the problems arising from the debate (chiefly, its ineffectuality – change is certain), it plays a part in helping critics and audiences shape their understandings and apply their own definitions to new versions. Inevitably, such interpretations are personal and subjective, and thus result in an array of receptive discussions and applied labels that are as diverse and complex as adaptation itself. Herein lies the issues with the academic obsession with taxonomising and categorising; it not only risks failure as a result of fluid forms, evolving genres, and subjective understandings, but also often neglects consideration of the parties whose applied definitions arguably really ‘matter’ – filmmakers and audiences. Rather than striving for exact definitions of remake types, this study takes for granted that remaking is a flexible concept, and that the films under consideration can be considered in a

variety of ways which overlap and inform each other. There are, however, identifiable groups of films which can be connected by their sub-genre or through their sources' connections, or within the context of their production histories. The next chapter develops the debates raised here over definitions to look at a group of 'reboots' of key horror franchises all released by the same production company, Platinum Dunes.

Chapter 4: Re-writing Horror Mythology: Platinum Dunes and the Franchise 'Reboot'

From the beginning of the horror remake boom, key production trends and notable industry figures were established, many becoming ever more apparent throughout the mid-2000s. While numerous directors (Marcus Nispel, Alexandre Aja, Nelson McCormick, Glen Morgan) and actors (Katie Cassidy, Danielle Panabaker, Jaime King, Ving Rhames) were involved in more than one remake, the inception of a number of production companies which specialised in horror adaptations represented a significant development for both the genre and remaking practices. Vertigo Entertainment, for example, was co-founded in 2004 by producer and professed 'king of remakes' Roy Lee, and was initially set up following the success of *The Ring* as a third party to sell the remake rights of Asian genre fare to American studios (Xu 2004). Lee subsequently produced new – and largely profitable – westernised versions of *The Grudge*, *Dark Water* and *The Eye* (David Moreau & Xavier Palud, 2008), among others.

In a similar fashion, but often looking closer to home for their source material, companies such as Strike Entertainment (*Dawn of the Dead*, *The Thing*), Dimension Films (*Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *Piranha*), and Screen Gems (*When A Stranger Calls*, *The Stepfather*, *Straw Dogs*, *Carrie*) have all repeatedly remade genre films after an initial success. The output of these producers arguably pales in comparison, however, to the significance of Platinum Dunes, a company which initiated the new cycle of remakes of 1970s and 1980s American horror with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 2003, and subsequently produced a number of the more notable films under discussion in this study.

What marks Platinum Dunes as especially important here is both their proclivity for 'rebooting' key horror franchises (as opposed to singular original films), and the largely unprecedented level of involvement the company had at key stages of production and promotion, identifying a group of otherwise

unconnected remakes as existing distinctively under the Platinum Dunes brand. This chapter uses their films as case studies, and begins by interrogating the company's practices and the commercial logic of their remaking, among other films, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. This highlights the level of (financial) success that horror remakes can achieve, suggesting the importance of the remake in sustaining commercial interest in the genre. The Platinum Dunes films have often been described as 'reboots', new versions which re-start a film franchise, and this chapter progresses to consider what is meant by the term and how we might understand the films' purpose within this context.

I then use three key films – *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – and provide a comparative analysis of each reboot's changes to the original films. By developing characters, back stories and narratives between versions, the films simultaneously rewrite and rely on the earlier franchises' mythologies, furthering and exploiting the iconic status of the original films' villains to appeal to both existing and new audiences. While differentiating the remakes from their source texts, the producers rely on brand recognition and nostalgia to market the films, and this challenges the notion that the franchise reboot seeks to disavow its origins and 'start again' entirely anew.

Platinum Dunes: 'The House the Remake Built'

Platinum Dunes was set up in late 2001 by producer/director Michael Bay in a deal with Radar Pictures, and was initially conceived as Radar's low budget genre division (Fleming 2001). Enlisting co-founders Brad Fuller, a college friend whose student film provided the name of the company (Hewitt 2007: 119), and Andrew Form, a former assistant to Jerry Bruckheimer with whom he had worked on the set of *Bad Boys* (Michael Bay, 1995), Bay announced to the trade press the company's mission objective of providing opportunities for first time directors from other fields to turn their hand to feature films. With the intention of producing films for under \$20million, restricting costs by casting TV stars or relative unknowns, shooting on location, and hiring directors primarily

experienced in commercials or music videos, Bay joked that the films' total budgets would be on a par with the cost of 'catering alone' for his action films *Pearl Harbour* (2001) and *Armageddon* (1998) (Fleming 2001). With Bay's business acumen evident from the company's beginnings, the producer told *Variety*:

These films will be done on the cheap [...] we don't want to do a lot of pictures, no more than a couple a year...these small films have a lot of profit potential. You can make them for \$5 million, and if they have two good weekends, they're widely profitable (Fleming 2001).

Bay's partners also never balk from acknowledging that Platinum Dunes is a commercial operation, and are frank when responding to criticism that their films enter production solely with profit potential in mind: 'this is a business and we always want to make a profit for our partners [...] when we evaluate what we do, certainly commerce is a big part of that discussion here and it's a big part of the equation when we go forward on a movie' (Fuller, in Gillam 2011).

Bay has openly stated that he decided to make Platinum Dunes' first film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, on the strength of its 'name value' alone, after target audience research indicated that although a majority had heard of Tobe Hooper's 1974 film and would be receptive to a new version, ninety per cent of those questioned had never actually seen it (Porter 2003). Bay created a 75 second conceptual trailer featuring a black screen and the sounds of a woman screaming for help as she is chased by an unseen Leatherface (the film's chainsaw-wielding killer), and screened it to potential investors at the American Film Market in early 2002 (Williams 2003: 25). New Line Cinema successfully pursued distribution rights to the as yet unmade film, leaving Platinum Dunes in a profitable position before even a line of script was in existence (Bay, in *Chainsaw Redux*). Bay's candid admission of his motivation for making the film ensured that, upon its release, *Chainsaw* was heavily criticised, in Roger Ebert's words, for 'feed[ing] on the corpse of a once living film' (Ebert 2003), and according to Mark Kermode, 'existing primarily to exploit a new target

audience who knew Hooper's movie only as a notorious brand name [...] [it is] a quintessential rebranding exercise – all form and no content' (Kermode 2003).

Criticism aside, Bay's shrewd business sense ensured a sound result. The \$9.5million budgeted film took three times that in its opening weekend (anon, *Trendspotting*), contributing to a total domestic gross of over \$80million during its theatrical run (Simon 2006). While none of the subsequent Platinum Dunes productions generated profit on the scale of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, their later horror remakes still proved relative commercial successes. *The Amityville Horror* made \$65 million in 2005, and *Chainsaw* prequel *The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006) took just under \$40million domestically the following year. Their last reboots, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, both made domestic grosses of \$63-65million each, with *Friday* taking over \$42million in its opening weekend, the largest for any horror film at that time.¹⁴ Minimising costs (with the exception of *Elm Street*'s reported, and still modest by Hollywood standards, \$35million budget) ensured that even a 'disappointment' such as the reported \$17million domestic gross on their 2007 remake of *The Hitcher* still resulted in a profit (all figures boxofficemojo.com).

Platinum Dunes' films are undoubtedly viable commercial 'products'. And yet, even though they talk openly about business decisions and profitable opportunities, the producers work to attempt to reassure fans of the originals of their 'respectful' intentions for new versions. While Bay oversaw production from afar and retained final cut of all the company's films, he largely remained off-set (Hewitt 2007: 119). Brad Fuller and Andrew Form, meanwhile, maintained a strong presence during production, featuring prominently in press previews and on-set reports, and making vociferous claims of their love of the genre. The two were keen to promote their solid working relationship, and observed how well they complement each other; they acknowledged that they could not work alone, or indeed without Bay's tutelage: 'Michael is so smart about the business of making movies and what makes them cool [...] He's willing to be helpful as

¹⁴ The record was usurped by *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost & Ariel Schulman) in 2011, which took over \$52.5million in its opening weekend.

often as he can, which is great' Fuller told *Fangoria* on the set of *The Amityville Horror*, adding 'It's like Drew and I are doing our term paper, but the professor is helping us write it' (in Kendzior 2005: 27). *Variety* noted how the pair finish each other's sentences (Donahue 2004), and Fuller spoke of his relationship with Form as one of 'literally the two most important relationships in my life', next to the one he shares with his wife (in Hewitt 2007: 119). Promoting this steady foundation and the partners' claims to both be horror fans, Form and Fuller consistently made nostalgic references to original films, adding credence to their pledges to 'honour' their sources and stay true to characters, thus aligning themselves with an existing fanbase. Simultaneously, the producers, cast and crew talked of making the films more relevant to contemporary audiences, of filling in plot holes and developing back stories, to make changes sufficient to offer something 'new' and hopefully therefore not 'pointless'. In the case of *Friday the 13th* for example, Fuller aligned Platinum Dunes' taste with that of their intended audience: 'There were projects out there that could have earned more money for us. But this...we love it', and then pledged loyalty: 'Everyone wants to be true to Jason, and that's a really important part of their script'; while promising that the final film would include some original elements: 'We try to choose projects that we can improve on [...] we always take on a project with the intent to do something with it that hasn't been done before (Carlson 2009: 43, 46, 43).

Fuller has defended Platinum Dunes' reputation; when asked by *Starburst* magazine if the company see themselves as 'the house that the remake made' (a reference to how New Line Cinema became known as 'the house that Freddy built' following the success of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984) he replied: 'I certainly think that is a fair representation of what we've done up until this point [...] that is not a moniker we would shy away from [...] we're fine with that'. With regards to his personal feelings, he added, 'I don't differentiate necessarily remakes from originals. I don't come to a remake and expect to hate it, I stay open minded. There have been some remakes that I've loved and some that I haven't [...] I take each movie for what it is' (in Gillam

2011). Fuller attempted to suggest a harmonious balance between respectful fidelity and necessary updating, but not everyone at Platinum Dunes was as content to openly defend the concept of 'remaking'. Indeed, the directors, stars, scriptwriters, and often the producers themselves offer a whole raft of supposedly different but ultimately synonymous labels when discussing the films. Thus, *The Amityville Horror* is a 'revamped' re-adaptation of the 1977 Jay Anson book on which it is based, not a 'reduxed' version of the 1979 film directed by Stuart Rosenberg (Kendzior 2005a: 8), Andrew Form maintains that *Friday the 13th* 'was not a remake of the original', but '1, 2, 3 pieces from a bunch of movies' (Weintraub 2010), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* director Samuel Bayer tells *Fangoria* 'I think of this film more as a rebirth than a remake' (in Rosales & Sucasas 2010: 28) and *USA Today* 'it's not a remake, it's a reinvention of the legend of Freddy Krueger' (Puente 2010). The most frequently used term, though, and the one which appears to have cemented itself as an appropriate label for press and audiences, is 'reboot'. In the following section, I will explore what is meant by the label 'reboot' and discuss how the concept relates to rewriting backstories or reinventing characters in the franchises.

The Franchise Reboot

It is not my intention here to provide a formal or absolute definition of the film reboot and the practice of rebooting. As discussed in chapter 3, attempts to construct distinct categories of adaptation with fixed labels and features are often futile due to both the intertextual nature of contemporary horror films and the propensity for cultural recycling in cinema more generally. However, as its use has become more commonplace over recent years, it is important to give consideration to at least its intended meaning and to interrogate the discourses surrounding it. Although often adopted (particularly in a critical context) as a term synonymous with remaking, rebooting should instead be understood as a particular type of adaptive process which relates specifically to a film franchise, and is most simply explained by the term's origin meaning in computing language – to re-start or re-load, to end a particular session and return to a

starting point afresh. William Proctor strives to mark a clear distinction of the practice from remaking, suggesting that:

[...] a film remake is a singular text bound within a self-contained narrative schema; whereas a reboot attempts to forge a series of films, to begin a franchise anew from the ashes of an old or failed property. In other words, a remake is a reinterpretation of one film; a reboot 're-starts' a series of films that seek to disavow and render inert its predecessor's validity. (Proctor 2012: 4)

According to Proctor, a reboot 'wipes the slate clean and begins the story again from "year one", from a point of origin and a parallel position'; key features of the reboot being both the representation of the franchise protagonist in a process of 'becoming' and a new narrative or timeline which effectively leaves the original storyline obsolete and renounces existing incarnations (Proctor 2012: 4-5). While remaking at its most basic definition can be seen to simply create a new version of a familiar tale, rebooting is defined by its attempt to replace, disavow, and thus perhaps eradicate the memory of an existing narrative.

The suggestion that a reboot sets out to entirely supersede an existing version is problematic, for a number of reasons. Most obviously, no singular text in this case can literally replace another. The original film is not deleted, and its memory and status for its audience is not defined by its retelling (although there is of course scope for franchise newcomers to equate a reboot as 'the definitive version'). Proctor does note the contradiction of defining the reboot by its negation of the original franchise in this sense, observing that rebooting 'does not eradicate the iconographic memory of the cultural product' (Proctor 2012: 5), yet discussions of reboots do frequently make reference to replacing, overwriting, disavowal and renunciation as if their very existence challenges that of a previous text. Craig Frost (2009), for example, has suggested that the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* 2003 negates the 'legitimacy' of Hooper's 1974 film, the reboot apparently inviting audiences to delete all knowledge or memory of the original and override both its narrative and iconic status. Furthermore, in accurately locating the reboot as a franchise-specific concept, the idea of

'replacing' any given narrative is rendered almost impossible. As Claire Parody notes:

Franchise entertainment relies on cohering principles other than narrative continuity, such as brand identity, adaptations, remakes, and similar re-versionings, and re-visionings can be intelligible to franchise consumers as simply facets of an over-arching entertainment experience, part of rather than in opposition to engaging with a beloved property (2011: 215-216).

A franchise film – including any remake or reboot – is best understood as part of this 'over-arching entertainment experience', which often consists of a much broader transmedia story world. In this world, any product across multiple platforms can act as a self-contained, independently enjoyable narrative and offer a point of entry into the wider universe to which it belongs, while simultaneously encouraging consumption of the other instalments, each text contributing to and enriching its universal whole (Jenkins 2008: 97-98). In this sense, a reboot must be understood as existing alongside its earlier versions rather than taking their place.

Furthermore, cultural iconography and thus brand recognition are important factors in promoting reboots and instilling faith in their potential audience, evident for example in Michael Bay's 'name-only' strategy for selling *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Adaptation – particularly within a franchise, where there is a wealth of iconic material for audiences to engage with – often trades on nostalgia for an earlier instalment. Audiences are not being asked to forget what came before, but to recollect it. Adopted as a commercial strategy, the reliance on nostalgia not only aids in selling a reboot, but also encourages audiences to revisit an earlier product or even re-engage with the franchise as a whole (Parody 2011: 215). The suggestion that a reboot replaces or otherwise challenges a version of itself from within its franchised universe defies commercial logic. Causing viewers to forget earlier incarnations would undoubtedly negate its own reason for being.

The reboot has key features which distinguish it from the remake; namely the focus on a character's origins or 'becoming'; the establishing of a new narrative arc; and the reboot's specific association with 'restarting' franchises. Yet rebooting and remaking, while not identical, do share commonalities which suggest that, rather than being oppositional concepts within the adaptation family, they are more closely intertwined than their attempted definitions would indicate. Most obviously, as discussed earlier in this study, remakes operate primarily by forging patterns of variation and repetition. So too do reboots, which aim to 'wipe the slate clean' while simultaneously calling upon the 'iconographic memory' of their franchises to appeal to audiences. The tendency to incorporate characters, settings and basic plot details from the beginnings of an original franchise often means that a new version could be labelled either a remake or a reboot, regardless of the filmmakers' intentions, depending upon the subjective interpretation of its audience.

The most successful reboots (in financial terms, as well as perhaps in relation to achieving their 'purpose') are attached to already broad franchises featuring numerous story parallels across multiple media. These films offer a wealth of opportunities to bring in elements (including character, plot details and so on) from entire (and often enormous) franchise universes, resulting in a heavily intertextual product intricately woven from numerous sources and referencing a range of franchise entries while creating its own. Larger franchises also offer a multitude of starting points to revisit and narratives to rewrite, as well as the opportunity to revitalise a franchise whose less popular later instalments have left its reputation waning. Commonly, rebooting these franchises involves big-budget Hollywood productions which are ultimately both profitable and often critically well received – successful recent examples include Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy (*Batman Begins*, 2005; *The Dark Knight*, 2008; *The Dark Knight Rises*, 2012) and J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013).

It is notable that these reboots stem from a franchise which was not initiated by a single film. In these particular cases, the franchise origins are a

comic book character and a television series, and both have very successfully grown over a number of decades to incorporate multiple retellings, versions and spin-offs across numerous media, establishing widely recognisable cultural iconography and acquiring a dedicated audience (and, in the case of *Star Trek*, a cult following). The practice of rebooting is itself neither exclusively related to film franchises nor a particularly new concept; reboots occurred in comic book 'multiverses' before this particular form of reinvention even had a name (Proctor 2012: 6). These blockbuster reboots highlight a clear distinction from something like the Platinum Dunes films, which take as their starting point a property which began as a single popular horror film and developed into a much smaller (and less globally recognisable) franchise. In these instances, mainstream (as opposed to fan) audiences, while likely familiar with the films' villains/monsters as iconic antagonists, and possibly with the original films and the overarching series, perhaps have less familiarity with more obscure entries in the franchise storyworlds including franchise crossovers, comics, games and so on, and so the concept most likely to be rebooted is that which featured within the original film. Ultimately then, the Platinum Dunes films are perhaps more akin to an audience understanding of a remake than a reboot. Yet the films do position themselves as and adopt key features of the reboot; developing and rewriting the origins of their antagonists, creating or expanding backstories, and constructing motive. While this is true of remakes broadly, what distinguishes a number of these films as reboots are their killers – recognisable, contemporary cultural icons which remain a constant throughout their franchises – and it is these characters which the producers take as a central focus for rebooting a franchise.

"Remember Me?" Horror Icons & Franchise Mythology

Rewriting history and developing franchise mythology, particularly that of the films' villains, is a key feature of the Platinum Dunes reboots, and again, something that is frequently promoted in previews and interviews as a point of differentiation from the original films. Indeed, the addition or development of background stories in these reboots is often discussed by filmmakers as part of

revisiting or reinventing a legend. The latter is how Samuel Bayer described his *Nightmare on Elm Street* (in Puente 2010) while asserting that the ‘classic elements of the [franchise] mythology’ would be included in this new film. Actor Jackie Earle Haley, who replaced fan favourite Robert Englund as *Nightmare*’s Freddy Krueger, described the character as ‘part of a campfire story’ (anon, 2010). Elsewhere, the return to ‘true stories’ is emphasised as a source for furthering myths. *Chainsaw*’s director Marcus Nispel told *Fangoria* how, in developing the remake, they ‘went much deeper’ into the story of Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein (in Allen 2003: 8 and 2003a: 21), whose predilection for keeping parts of his victims and other exhumed bodies as souvenirs inspired much of the production design for the 1974 film. *The Amityville Horror* was promoted as a ‘more accurate adaption’ of the 1977 Jay Anson novel, itself supposedly based on true events (Kendzior 2005a), and screenwriter Scott Kosar ‘invented some mythology’ to bring together two unconnected legends from the book which are used to explain the hauntings (the house is claimed to be built on land where both a native American tribe sent its sick members to die, and a white settler practised witchcraft) (Kendzior 2005b: 35). Kosar changes the character Jack Ketchum from a devil worshipper to a deranged priest who performs torturous ‘exorcisms’ on remaining Shinnecock Indians before eventually killing his family; actions later repeated by patriarch George Lutz in both the original film and its remake.

Alongside the changes to origin stories, reducing the campy, comic sensibilities of later series instalments and opting instead to return to a darker and more serious tone, is a feature of the three most notable Platinum Dunes films – *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. On a surface level, this is most apparent in aesthetic changes, for example, a rejection of the bright, cartoonish colours of some of the later franchise instalments in the 1980s; all three films feature a more muted, desaturated colour palette which is most notable in *Chainsaw*’s sepia and tobacco tones, no doubt in part the result of cinematographer Daniel Pearl (who worked on Hooper’s film) returning to work on the reboot. But it is also evident

in the approach to the villains at the centre of the franchises; their backstories and actions feature much darker themes or motivations, convoluted and high-concept plots are rejected, clichéd, jokey dialogue is replaced, and their threatening nature is reinstated. Within the context of these franchises, the antagonists (Leatherface, Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger, respectively) can almost be considered the series protagonists. They are the main attraction for fans, becoming the character which audiences 'root for' if not identify with. Their persistent presence (often despite being killed at the end of every episode, just to be resurrected in each sequel, as in the case of Voorhees and Krueger) within the franchise makes them central characters, even taking into consideration recurring series heroes such as *Friday's* Tommy Jarvis (Tom Shepherd/Corey Feldman) or *Elm Street's* Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp). Ultimately, it is these series' villains whose presence in the reboots is required. It is not important that Sally (Marilyn Burns) is replaced by Erin (Jessica Biel) in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, or even that Nancy returns in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but it is absolutely essential that Leatherface, Voorhees and Krueger come back, and it is around these characters that the reboots are developed. This section considers how these characters are reinvented, or their 'credibility' as horror icons reinstated, within the new versions through a variety of approaches to their origin and background stories.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre

Central to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* series is the extensive and complex cannibal family, whose members and relationships change with each film. While still featuring primary antagonist Leatherface, the shifting family dynamics in each sequel alter his position within the group and thus his purpose and personality, challenging the legitimacy of his monstrous role at the centre of the clan. It is this element which is most obviously explored in the reboot, and a comparative discussion of Leatherface's role across the instalments can frame

an understanding of how the character is positioned in the 2003 film and its prequel.

In Tobe Hooper's original film, the family of ex-slaughterhouse workers exist as a parodic reflection of the patriarchal nuclear family (see chapter 6 for further discussion). The father figure, played by Jim Siedow and credited as simply 'Old Man', owns a gas station-cum-barbeque, with meat of suspicious origins supplied by his grave robbing, kidnapping and murdering sons, Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) and the 'Hitchhiker' (Edwin Neal). At home, an ancient, decaying Grandfather (John Dugan) completes the unit, and the family survive by capturing and killing, living off human meat and roadkill. Typical family scenarios, such as sitting together at the dining table, are subverted (here, including the captured Sally in the group, tied to a dining chair and served the same dubious meal which the rest of the family happily consume), and traditional gender roles are both confused and mocked. The insane Leatherface is harangued by his father and brother, the Old Man ordering him back into the kitchen and threatening beatings during the final scenes, in which he wears an untidily made-up woman's face (his habit of wearing the skinned faces of their victims provides his name). This posits Leatherface as a brow-beaten family matriarch, which is in direct opposition to his family's requirement for him, as the biggest, strongest member of the household, to capture and butcher their victims. The patriarchal Old Man, while demanding respect from his sons, is belittled by the Hitchhiker, who tells a screaming Sally "he's just the cook", before reminding his father "you're just the cook...you ain't nothin'. Me and him [Leatherface] do all the work". The reverence in which the grandfather is held is made clear when the Hitchhiker insists he is given the honour, as the former 'best' slaughterer, of killing Sally.

Further franchise instalments complicate familial connections. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Tobe Hooper 1986) also features the grandfather (Ken Evert), Leatherface (Bill Johnson) and the cook/Old Man, who is here named as Drayton Sawyer. The Hitchhiker (referred to as 'Nubbins') appears only as a corpse, preserved by the family and dragged around by his brother, Chop Top

(Bill Moseley), who, it is implied, was serving in Vietnam during the events of the previous film. The dark parody of the first film is furthered here; Hooper claimed that he wanted to emphasise the blackly comic humour which he felt many viewers had missed in his 1974 film (in Gregory 2000). As a result, the verité style of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is replaced with a highly stylised and frenetic approach to a narrative which sees ex-Texas Ranger Lefty (Dennis Hopper) and local radio DJ Stretch (Caroline Williams) take on the family, who now live under an abandoned amusement park. Characters become not only more comic, but increasingly cartoon-like: Chop Top is a hippy veteran who first appears in a Sonny Bono wig, later revealed to cover an exposed metal plate in his head; showing a tendency to self-harm, as per his Hitchhiker brother, he burns and picks off dead skin from around the plate before eating it, and is also seen cutting the skin on his neck.

Leatherface himself is presented almost as a sympathetic character. In the first film, his mistreatment by his family is apparent, as is his fear of outsiders and the unknown; there is a suggestion that he only kills of his own volition in what he perceives as self-defence, when someone intrudes in the family home. In the sequel, the idea that he only murders on command, through family loyalty and the inability to act independently, is furthered. In an attack at the radio station, Leatherface chases Stretch on the instructions of his brother to “get that bitch”, but develops an infatuation with her – insinuated in a sequence where he presses the blade of his chainsaw against the DJ’s crotch – and lets her live, lying to Chop Top about her fate. When Stretch turns up at the family home, Leatherface attempts to hide her, covering her face in one which he skins from her dying friend L.G. (Lou Perryman). Upon finding her trying to escape however, they mock: “Bubba’s been playing with her, Bubba likes her...Bubba’s got a girlfriend!” to an embarrassed Leatherface, who once again refuses to kill her. Ultimately, despite Drayton’s warning that “you have one choice, boy, sex or the saw...the saw is family”, Leatherface refuses to be complicit in Stretch’s demise, leaving her final (winning) fight to take place with Chop Top.

The bullied yet ultimately independent, and arguably more 'human' Leatherface of Hooper's films is different from the character in both *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Jeff Burr 1990) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* (Kim Henkel 1994). In the second sequel, he is certainly portrayed as autonomous (he kills of his own volition and has a daughter, whose care he is at least involved in), but he is also independently aggressive and unremittingly violent; he does not kill for necessity. In *The Next Generation*, he reverts to a more childlike state; as in Hooper's first film, he is nervous and responds to orders from his relatives. He is also highly effeminate and practices transvestism, wearing a woman's skin suit and face, and dressing in a negligee and make up, furthering his sub-matriarchal position from the original, but to an almost entirely submissive level. The idea posited in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, that Leatherface can think and act independently from his family, is rejected in these two instalments. In *Leatherface*, the eponymous villain (R.A. Mihailoff) is presented with a saw inscribed with Drayton's words from the previous film, now a motto: 'the saw is family' – a reminder of his place within the clan.

Family connections are somewhat difficult to establish in both of these films, suggesting Leatherface either acquires adopted families, moves to live with distant relatives, is the product of inbreeding, or even potentially that separate narrative universes exist in opposition to the first two films (that these separate family units do not mention each other, in addition to a family name change in the last film, would support this idea). In the third instalment, in addition to his daughter, Leatherface lives with three brothers – Tex (Viggo Mortenson), Tinker (Joe Unger) and Alfredo (Tom Everett) – and 'Mama' (Miriam Byrd-Nethery). In *The Next Generation*, the family unit comprises Leatherface (Robert Jacks), his brothers Walter/W.E. (Joe Stevens) and Vilmer Slaughter (Matthew McConaughey), and Vilmer's girlfriend Darla (Tonie Perenski). Events in the final third of this last film imply that the family may in fact not be a family at all; a mysterious character known only as Mr. Rothman (James Gale) reveals that they are part of an Illuminati conspiracy group, and

that the Slaughters are but one unit of a number of similar groups scattered around the world. Familial connections become confused within the final two Chainsaw instalments, and the (albeit twisted) values which are central to the Sawyers' existence in the first film – family loyalty, killing for necessity rather than 'fun' – are challenged throughout the sequels. By *The Next Generation*, it is impossible to establish how Leatherface is connected to the other characters, and the family treat each other with total contempt.

Marcus Nispel's 2003 *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* takes the displaced and convoluted familial unit as its starting point for rebooting the franchise. Instead of reinstating the Sawyers of Hooper's films, this new version takes existing archetypes (e.g. the patriarch, the grandfather, the idiot child) and creates an entirely new, extended, and still somewhat complicated family. Leatherface is given a new name (and in fact is not referred to as Leatherface at all within the dialogue), Thomas Hewitt (Andrew Bryniarski), and his all-male cannibal clan from the first film is replaced with a new group. The character is provided with motivation for his psychopathic behaviour and a reason to wear his skin masks: tumours ate away at his face as a child, causing him to be bullied. The 'family' appears to consist of aggressive patriarch Sheriff Hoyt, a corrupt law official (played by R. Lee Ermey in essentially a reprisal of his *Full Metal Jacket* [Stanley Kubrick 1987] role), his mother Luda Mae (Marietta Marich), a possible grandfather or uncle, amputee Old Monty (Terrence Evans), a young boy, Jedidiah (David Dorfman), and two further aunt-like figures who live in a trailer near the Hewitt household, Henrietta (Heather Kafka) and the 'Tea Lady' (Kathy Lamkin).

That the genetic connections between the characters are never entirely apparent, and that the majority feature either physical or mental defects, strongly suggests that many characters may be the result of inbreeding in the family, and it is further implied that new members are acquired by keeping the young children of their victims and raising them as their own. The film opens with a scene equivalent to that in its 1974 counterpart, where Sally and her friends pick up a hitchhiker who, it transpires, is part of the Sawyer family. In

this instance, protagonist Erin and her companions pick up a shaken, bloodied victim of the Hewitts, who subsequently shoots herself in their van, her suicide the catalyst for the narrative as the group then wait for the Sheriff and ultimately become prey for his family. Towards the end of the film, Erin seeks refuge in Henrietta and the Tea Lady's trailer (believing the pair will help her), where she notices a photograph of the hitchhiker holding a baby, which Henrietta now claims as her own.

According to Form and Fuller, the changes to the familiar family at the centre of the franchise were made to ensure that audiences had no idea what to expect from characters' behaviour (in *Chainsaw Redux*). Instead of reinventing the Sawyers, the filmmakers instead opted to keep the iconic Leatherface, but change the dynamics of the family and develop the unit as some kind of 'composite monster', according to screenwriter Scott Kosar, 'populated with the kind of characters that are so marginalised from society [...] so foreign to anyone that lives in a big city that the moment you see them, your skin starts to crawl' (in *Chainsaw Redux*). This is not only evident in the family's behaviour – cannibalism, murder, sexual assault, battery and child abduction among their crimes – but also their physical appearances. Supporting the suggestion that they are inbred, numerous family members have physical defects. Others are morbidly obese, grotesquely thin, sickly or buck-toothed, and all (except the mute Leatherface) speak with a stereotypically thick Southern inflection.

The relationships between family members are made significantly clearer in the 2006 prequel, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman). It is established that Hoyt's real name is Charlie Hewitt, his identity stolen after he and Leatherface kill the local Sheriff (Lew Temple), and that Monty is in fact his Uncle (who loses his legs after a victim shoots him in self-defence, and Leatherface subsequently amputates them). That the family are cannibalistic – something only implied in the 2003 film by the suspicious strips of meat seen hanging in the kitchen – is confirmed here when the real Hoyt is cut up and served in a stew. The focus in the prequel, as far as providing an origin story goes, is largely on Leatherface, or rather how Thomas Hewitt

becomes the familiar Leatherface. The film opens with his birth to a slaughterhouse worker on the processing plant's floor, where he is promptly discarded by the abattoir's owner and found in a dumpster by Luda Mae, who takes him home to raise as her own. He works in the slaughterhouse as an adult, and his first murder is of his supervisor following the closure of his workplace. Hewitt acquires his chainsaw from the plant, and the prequel witnesses both his first kill with his iconic weapon and the first time he skins a victim's face to wear as his own. Previously wearing just a half-mask which covers his jaw, cheeks and nose, Leatherface earns his name by removing Eric's (Matthew Bomer) face and placing it over his own, his actions validated by Hoyt, who tells him: "I like your new face".

Ultimately, the emphasis in the reboot and in *The Beginning* is on re-establishing a strange, cannibalistic, Texan extended family (even if this is convoluted and ineffective as an equivalent to the comedic imitation of a nuclear family from Hooper's films), and especially on reaffirming Leatherface's centrality to this unit. The film does this by striving to make him a partially sympathetic character through stories of his physical disability, suffering at the hands of bullies, and the family's insistence that he is a simple, gentle giant figure, despite evidence to the contrary. At one point in Nispel's film, Heather describes him as a "poor, sweet boy", and ironically claims "he's no trouble, keeps himself to himself" to Erin, who has just witnessed Leatherface murder her friend whilst wearing the skin he removed from her boyfriend's face. Although there are no questions surrounding family loyalty (except in regard to Jedidiah, who refuses to partake in the family's murderous actions), and Leatherface does act on instructions from his relatives, he is also seen to be independent, intentionally violent, and psychopathic rather than intellectually disabled – in some ways, much closer to the Leatherface of the third franchise instalment. There is also no attempt to present him as feminised, as a substitute matriarch as seen in a number of the earlier films, and in employing not one, but three maternal figures (Henrietta, the Tea Lady, Luda Mae), there is no need. The reboot rewrites the history and composition of the family, gives Leatherface

a backstory and re-establishes him as a central, monstrous figure, but it also promotes a return to a darker, more serious and threatening tone than the franchise ending at *The Next Generation* would have allowed.

Friday the 13th

Despite being the most prolific of the three franchises under discussion here, consisting of eleven instalments (including the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* crossover, *Freddy vs Jason*, Ronny Yu 2003) prior to the reboot, the *Friday the 13th* series focuses less on revealing the back story of its eventual antagonist, machete-wielding, hockey-masked serial killer Jason Voorhees. The original film was not intended as the beginning of a franchise, but instead provides what can later be seen as an origin story from which the sequels spin off. In Sean S. Cunningham's 1980 film, teenagers working at a soon to reopen summer camp at Crystal Lake are attacked by an initially unseen killer. The murderer is revealed at the end of the film as a woman named Pamela Voorhees (Betsy Palmer), avenging the death of her son Jason at the camp some years prior. Jason drowned due to the negligence of camp counsellors who, rather than supervising the boy in the lake, had absconded to have sex; Mrs Voorhees exacts her revenge particularly upon promiscuous couples (something which becomes a series staple). She is beheaded in the film's finale by Alice (Adrienne King), who is subsequently seen in a dream sequence being pulled in to the lake by a young, deformed Jason (Ari Lehman), suggesting he is still alive. This is revealed to indeed be the case in *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Steve Miner 1981), in which a fully grown Jason (Warrington Gillette) returns to kill Alice, before stalking a new group of counsellors at Camp Crystal Lake. This episode sets the precedent for much of the rest of the franchise, with events in both *Friday the 13th Part III* (Steve Miner 1982) and *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (Joseph Zito 1984) following a similar trajectory. Jason (Ted White) is killed at the end of *The Final Chapter* by a young boy named Tommy Jarvis (Corey Feldman), who subsequently becomes the protagonist of the following sequel, *Friday the 13th: A New Beginning* (Danny Steinmann 1985).

A New Beginning is something of an anomaly within the *Friday the 13th* franchise. Cunningham's first film aside, it is the only instalment which does not feature Voorhees as an antagonist. As the title suggests, the film was intended as an attempt to restart the series, and features a copycat killer, Roy (Dick Wieand) who terrorises the institution where a now-adult Tommy (John Shepherd), traumatised by his childhood encounter with Voorhees, resides. Roy is defeated by Tommy, who in the film's final scene dons Jason's hockey mask, implying he will take on the killer's persona in any future instalment. Yet the following sequel, *Jason Lives: Friday the 13th Part VI* (Tom McLoughlin, 1986) ignores the insinuation of *A New Beginning's* finale, instead opening with Tommy (Thom Matthews) and his friend breaking into the cemetery where Voorhees (C.J. Graham) is buried. Tommy intends to cremate his body but inadvertently resurrects him instead when a bolt of lightning strikes the metal rod he uses to repeatedly stab Jason's corpse. *Jason Lives* marks a new direction for the franchise by presenting Voorhees as a zombified creature of superhuman strength, impervious to pain and seemingly impossible to kill. The following films, *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood* (John Carl Buechler, 1988) and *Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* (Rob Hedden, 1989) see Jason (Kane Hodder) brought back to life via telekinesis and electrocution respectively, before the series continued Jason's reign of terror via possession (*Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*, Adam Marcus 1993), and set a final film in space, in the future, with Voorhees cryogenically frozen and subsequently turned into a cyborg (*Jason X*, James Isaac 2001). These last two films in the franchise were produced by New Line Cinema, having obtained rights from Paramount (who retained the *Friday the 13th* title). The two studios had been in negotiation regarding a franchise crossover between *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (New Line) and *Friday the 13th* (Paramount) for some years, and the shift to New Line was undertaken in part to facilitate the development of *Freddy vs. Jason*. The project was initially intended for release following *Jason Goes to Hell*, as evidenced by the film's subtitle, and during the final scene, when Krueger's knived glove suddenly breaks through the ground to retrieve Voorhees' hockey mask, bringing together the two iconic figures of each

franchise. But development issues delayed it for a number of years. *Jason X* was eventually produced to retain interest in the franchise and in the character of Voorhees, and events take place so far in the future so as not to disrupt series continuity (Bracke 2005).

Friday the 13th (2009) shares a number of similarities with Platinum Dunes' *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake. Most obviously, these include the return of director Marcus Nispel and director of photography Daniel C. Pearl, and thus a comparable visual style. More notably, however, as Nispel's *Chainsaw* does with *Leatherface*, *Friday the 13th* returns Jason Voorhees to his origins, reinstating him as a dark character and source of fear while striving to portray him in a semi-sympathetic way. The film adapts elements of at least the first three *Friday* films, and deals with the entire narrative of Cunningham's 1980 film – that Jason's mother is in fact the killer – with a brief opening sequence which ends with a very young Jason witnessing his mother's decapitation. Pamela Voorhees' brief appearance, it transpires, was only added in post-production following test screening complaints about the exclusion of the whole narrative foundation of the franchise (Weintraub 2010). Regardless, the inclusion of this story provides motivation for Jason's behaviour. Presented throughout the original franchise predominantly as a monstrous, unthinking killer, with little concern for the identity of his victims, this sequence gives Voorhees a much clearer purpose in the reboot. After Pamela Voorhees' attacker has fled the scene, Jason emerges from his hiding place to inspect his mother's body, and he hallucinates her instructing "they must be punished, Jason, for what they did to you. For what they did to me...kill for mother".

Voorhees takes his mother's head, keeping it as the centre of a shrine found some years later by Mike (Nick Mennell) and Whitney (Amanda Righetti) while exploring an abandoned Camp Crystal Lake, a similar monument to the one discovered by Ginny (Amy Steel) in *Friday the 13th Part 2*. Jason's reverence for his mother provides an explanation for taking a captive, something he had not previously done throughout the entire franchise. Whitney is presumed dead at the end of a long (22 minute) pre-credit sequence which

sees Jason kill her four friends, and finishes from her point of view with the killer running at her, machete ready to strike. The extended opening provides narrative causation for the rest of the film, as Whitney's brother Clay (Jared Padalecki) searches the area for his missing sister. She is found alive in Jason's underground hideout, her appearance apparently so close to that of Pamela Voorhees that the killer not only chooses to keep rather than dispatch her, but also that she is able to persuade him away from Clay in the film's final scenes, pretending to be his mother for long enough to distract him, take his machete, and stab him through the chest.

Nispel's film offers little in the way of rewriting Voorhees' backstory, opting instead for a 'respectful' retelling of events (as witnessed by the inclusion of the opening scene with Mrs Voorhees at the request of fans) alongside repeating the franchise's formulaic approach to sex (promiscuity, female nudity, and trite lines during sex scenes: "your tits are stupendous...you have perfect nipple placement, baby") and violence (sudden, brutal, with a high body count). What the reboot focuses on is the reaffirmation of Jason's status as a horror icon. He upgrades from a sack hood to his recognisable hockey mask a little over a third of the way through the film, something which the original franchise took three films to develop, and thus is almost instantly familiar as the iconic Voorhees most commonly seen across earlier instalments. The character Crazy Ralph (Walt Gorney), who brings portents of doom in the first two films ("You'll never come back...it's got a death curse!", "you're doomed if you stay here!") and equivalent characters from later sequels, such as the boat's deck hand in *Jason Takes Manhattan* ("you're all gonna die...he's come back for you!") are replaced here with a local woman (Rosemary Knowler) who Clay encounters while looking for Whitney. She warns him "outsiders come, they bring trouble...we just want to be left alone, and so does he." These 'messengers' instil fear in both the protagonists and the audience, confirming Jason's presence and status, and anticipating his likely actions.

Other scenes further the 'legend' of Jason, for example during the opening section when Whitney, Mike and their friends, gathered around a

campfire, listen to Wade (Jonathan Sadowski) tell the story of Pamela Voorhees' death, and how her son, "deformed or retarded or something...he came back". This storytelling is familiar from numerous films in the *Friday* series, where characters tell tales of his past, often early on in films. The motif provides information, perhaps to an unfamiliar viewer, about Jason, his history and his actions, but it also confirms his status as a thing of legend and campfire tales, worthy of recounting events surrounding him over and over again. When Wade's friend chides: "this story could've happened anywhere dude, that's how they get little kids to shit themselves", it could be suggested that this not only refers to the commonality of Wade's type of story, but also its timeless, mythological nature. Such storytelling tropes are apparent in other genre texts, in films such as *Urban Legend* (Jamie Blanks, 1998) which self-consciously reworked the idea of the horror film as fairy tale/myth, and also in similar 'campfire tales' scenes, not only in the *Friday the 13th* films, but elsewhere in the genre as well, including *The Fog*, *Cabin Fever* and even a film named for the trope, *Campfire Tales* (William Cook & Paul Talbot, 1991). Such sequences often feature as convenient exposition, but in the *Friday the 13th* reboot, it also serves to prompt audience recollection of the franchise's origins and recognition of its antagonist. Jason Voorhees is a thing to be feared, familiar and notorious, and his iconic status is furthered both through the existence of the film itself, but also within the text through stories of his 'legend', which works to inform characters but also operates on the assumption that the audience know who he is and what he does.

A Nightmare on Elm Street

Over six sequels, and a subsequent franchise crossover with *Friday the 13th* (*Freddy vs. Jason*), the tone of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films changed significantly. Wes Craven's original film does feature some comic imagery in certain scenes, such as antagonist Freddy Krueger's arms stretching, concertina-like, allowing his frame to fill the alleyway down which he chases Tina (Amanda Wyss), and the dark, acerbic one-liners with which Krueger torments his victims are as evident here as they are in subsequent sequels. Yet

the 1984 film largely 'plays it straight', presenting Krueger as a mysterious and terrifying 'bogeyman' above all else, and the deaths of the Elm Street teenagers as violent, bloody and horrifying. In stark contrast, later instalments see Krueger's behaviour and dialogue become increasingly trite, nightmare sequences more absurd and set-ups ever more high-concept, with forays into possession (*A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge*, Jack Sholder, 1985) and psychic ability (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, Chuck Russell, 1987) appearing early in the series, and a *Twilight Zone*-esque sixth film (*Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*, Rachel Talalay, 1991) in which protagonists become trapped in Krueger's home town of Springwood after he depletes the entire teenage population. Death sequences too became increasingly comedic, the visceral, bloody deaths of Tina and Glen (Johnny Depp) from the first film eventually replaced with equivalent scenes where a victim is turned into a cockroach and squashed (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*, Renny Harlin, 1988), a graphic novel artist is drawn into a nightmare within his own comic book, turned to paper and slashed to pieces by 'Superfreddy' (*A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Dream Child*, Stephen Hopkins, 1989), or Krueger kills a stoned video gamer by controlling his hallucinations through a console (*Freddy's Dead*).

As is common with other franchises, the sequels frequently provide further details of Krueger's backstory and eventually his childhood. But this story becomes increasingly convoluted as the series progresses. In Wes Craven's 1984 film, Krueger is revealed as a child murderer who was burnt alive by local parents; he undertakes his revenge by haunting the nightmares of their now teenaged children and killing them in their sleep. Throughout later instalments, the concept of Krueger as the 'son of a hundred maniacs' is introduced when it is revealed that his mother was a nun who was repeatedly raped by the inmates of the psychiatric hospital where she worked and was accidentally trapped. *Freddy's Dead* functions to some extent as an origin story. It details Krueger's sociopathic behaviour as a child, shows him murdering first his abusive adoptive guardian and later, as an adult, his wife (an act witnessed

by his daughter) when she discovers he has been killing local children. Krueger is arrested but later released on a technicality, and subsequently captured and burnt to death by the parents of the children he murdered. His eventual supernatural existence is explained by three 'Dream Demons' who here appear at the moment of his death, promising immortality in return for him haunting teens' nightmares.

The *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise features an interesting instalment which, if not attempting to 'reboot' the entire series (at least not by the term's subsequent definition), strived to revisit it, to reignite interest, explore origins and further the franchise mythology. *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994) featured actors from the 1984 original playing themselves in a postmodern, 'real-life' narrative which sees Englund, Craven and staff at New Line including producer Robert Shaye trying to convince Heather Langenkamp to reprise her role as Final Girl Nancy. The film posits Krueger as the demonic embodiment of ancient evil, and the *Nightmare* films as a portal to the human world – the concept being that only Langenkamp, as Nancy, can defeat such a force. Furthering Krueger's backstory *outside* of the preceding *Elm Street* films, in a 'metafilm' format which presents the antagonist as a very real force of evil, could be seen to confuse both the story and character arcs of the earlier sequels. However, the film ultimately provides an opportunity to reaffirm Krueger's iconic status and canonise the franchise in the annals of contemporary American horror cinema. Langenkamp asserts that "every kid knows who Freddy is. He's like Santa Claus, or King Kong...", and Englund is seen on a chat show, in full Freddy costume and make up, telling an audience of adoring fans "you're all my children now" – a sentiment repeated from earlier sequels. Through persistent Hansel and Gretel motifs, the franchise is likened to an old fairytale and Krueger's evil to that of a recognisable, ancient archetype -- the witch¹⁵. The 'real' Krueger is presented in a much darker way than Englund's portrayal of him as a fictional character. His burn-scarred skin is emphasised through additional make-up detail, and his knifed glove is made

¹⁵ Interestingly, make up designs for the first sequel were refined to make Krueger resemble a 'male witch' (in *Never Sleep Again*)

organic by incorporating the blades into his hand and adding visible bone and muscle. Death scenes are reminiscent of the original film, and Krueger's one liners become more menacing and far less comedic. It is in this return to a darker tone where *New Nightmare* succeeds in setting a precedent for rebooting the franchise – even though this did not take place for a further sixteen years.

A Nightmare on Elm Street 2010 leaves behind the comic tone which came to be associated with the franchise in later sequels, taking inspiration from *New Nightmare* by returning Freddy to his dark roots. Aesthetically, this is achieved through heavy reliance on prosthetics and CGI to create a more horrifically disfigured (and more realistically scarred) Krueger (Jackie Earle Haley), by retaining an eerie, surreal element in dream sequences while avoiding the absurd, and by featuring a muted, dark colour palette. The protagonists' ability to avoid Freddy by staying awake (all of the films understandably deal with mental fatigue and sleep deprivation), and thus the idea of the real world as a safe space, is removed by introducing 'micronaps', meaning he is able to reach his victims in very short bursts of sleep during their waking hours. Krueger's dialogue retains a darkly comic sensibility, often through sinister references to childhood and childish games with lines like "tag, you're it" as he slashes Quentin's (Kyle Gallner) chest, likening his chasing Kris (Katie Cassidy) to a game of hide and seek, and referring to his torture of Jesse (Thomas Dekker) as "playtime".

Quotable lines from the original film and sequels ("I'm your boyfriend now", "how's this for a wet dream?") are repeated in the reboot. However, within the context of significant plot changes, these, and the references to childhood games, take on an entirely new, more disturbing meaning. Bayer's film develops a direct connection between Krueger and his victims which did not feature in the original, completely removing the concept of Krueger as a child killer: 'he probably has killed', Brad Fuller stated in an on set interview, 'but that's not our angle' (in Weintraub 2010). Instead, the reboot is the only *Elm Street* film to explicitly label Krueger a paedophile. The original franchise did hint at child

abuse – most notably in *Freddy's Dead*, where the teenagers are all residents of a halfway house following mental, sexual and physical parental abuse – and Krueger was initially intended as a child molester as well as murderer, but these plans were 'soft pedalled' during development, which coincided with a prominent real-life case in a Californian school (in *Never Sleep Again*). Novelisations and initial scripts featured overt references, for example in explicit lines such as "down where he [Krueger] fucks you" and "your asshole belongs to me, Kincaid" in an early screenplay draft of *Dream Warriors* (in *Never Sleep Again* and Dickson 2012), yet not one of the final films ever openly confronted or confirmed the suggestion. This significant change positions the *Elm Street* teens of 2010 as victims of forgotten childhood trauma forced to remember and revisit their abuse, rather than solely suffering for the actions of their parents.

Interesting questions regarding Krueger's possible innocence crop up here too; there is a suggestion that the parents killed Krueger based on stories which the children invented, and that his supernatural return is to punish the now teenaged *Elm Street* youth for lying. However, the potential for this story arc is ultimately unrealised. Any ambiguity surrounding Krueger's actions are resolved in the film's final act, when Nancy (Rooney Mara) and Quentin discover Freddy's 'secret room', hidden in the school basement/boiler room which features in the original series, and complete with a set of obscene Polaroids of a young Nancy, who Krueger reminds her "was always my favourite". Positioning the human Krueger as a paedophile, and the supernatural Krueger as a paedophile/killer, not only evokes fear in the teenagers in the film's present, but also forces disturbing, painful recollections from their childhoods. The reboot inarguably furthers Krueger's evilness by showing him as a paedophile, something the original franchise only insinuated. Discussions of the *Elm Street* films often mistakenly make reference to Freddy Krueger as a child molester (Trencansky 2001: 65, Clover 1992: 28, Cherry 2009: 107, among others), but the Platinum Dunes film realises this myth.

Selling the Reboot

Changes to the narratives of the original films and the associated development of franchise legends and origin stories inarguably offer something new for audiences, and strive to differentiate the reboots from their sources. So too does the emphasis on returning to supposed 'true stories' where possible, promoting inspiration from real-life events rather than just the original films themselves, as in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Amityville Horror*. Most notably, the rebooted *Chainsaw*, *Nightmare* and *Friday* all feature darker, arguably 'scarier' antagonists, even while simultaneously taking a sympathetic position towards their past, as seen in Leatherface's disfiguring condition and bullying, Jason witnessing his mother's death, and even Krueger's potential – if ultimately disproven – innocence. Yet, as is common in remade or rebooted films, the new versions feature reverential references which both pay homage to the franchise origins, and offer points of recollection and identification for fans of the originals. As mentioned previously, Pamela Voorhees appeared in *Friday the 13th* following a request from test audiences. While utilising a different composer, elements of Harry Manfredini's score for the 1980 film, including the iconic 'ki-ki-ki, ma-ma-ma' noise which represents Jason's silent approach, is adopted, and a number of kills take inspiration from the original series. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (and *The Beginning*) features an opening narration by John Larroquette similar to the one he provided for the 1974 film (subsequently imitated by other actors for the sequels). Bay has also remarked how, in having Daniel Pearl reprise his cinematographer role for *Chainsaw*, he was giving fans 'a ring to kiss' (in *Chainsaw Redux*). Discourses of memory even feature throughout the diegesis of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*; much of the plot is motivated by uncovering information and recollecting events, and Freddy's menacing line "remember me?" could just as legitimately be aimed at his audience as his victim, in much the same way his "miss me?" of 1994's *New Nightmare* was perhaps intended. The reboots, while asserting their own positions within (and simultaneously striving to restart) the franchises, also rely heavily on recognition and recollection for their success.

The need for audiences to remember what came before is also especially apparent in promotion, and particularly on posters for the films. The images all clearly call upon the iconography of each of the franchises' antagonists, be that the shadowy, obscured Leatherface, the imposing façade of the Amityville house, Freddy's knived glove, fedora and burnt skin, or Jason's hockey mask. The *Elm Street* poster welcomes viewers to their 'new nightmare', at once promoting a fresh take and also irreverently referring to the earlier franchise instalment, while *Friday the 13th's* similar welcome to Crystal Lake is steeped in an ironic nod to that very familiar (if entirely unwelcoming) summer camp. The reboot posters are reminiscent of promotion for earlier sequels, where Freddy, Jason and Leatherface, by then cultural icons, provided recognition enough to appeal to franchise fans. Both sets are very different from posters advertising the originals, which all feature monsters as then unknown and still to earn their iconic status (see Figure 3). The antagonists are all prominent in some form, of course, but the images ask the viewer to care a little more about the victims than the villains, even if that is just by questioning their fate. Reliance on nostalgia is just as important here as rewriting history and audiences are asked to remember what came before, not to forget. In order for these retellings to function within their respective franchises, they must adhere to the parameters of their myths even as they try to develop and expand them, and so the overarching approach is one of addition and refinement as opposed to complete replacement.

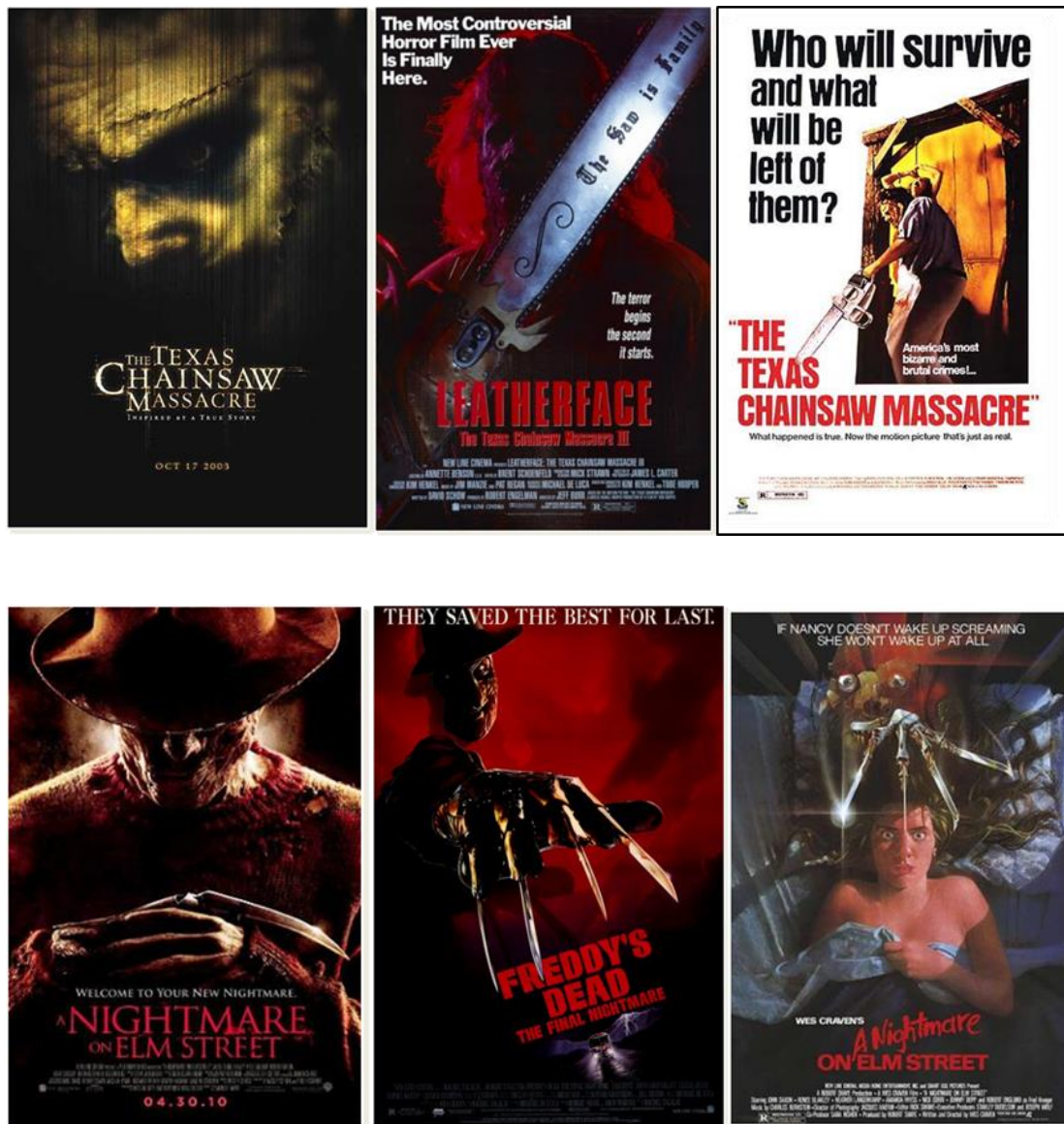


Figure 3: Changing representations of franchise villains in posters for (L-R) reboots, sequels and originals

Conclusion

While the Platinum Dunes reboots proved financially successful, critical and audience reception has been mediocre at best, and fans of the originals are often even less enamoured with the films. ‘You should see some of the emails I get’, Brad Fuller has stated, noting that the producers get ‘annihilated online all day long’ (in Weintraub 2010). It would be easy to speculate that this kind of response is part of the reason for the slowing of output from the company. There was a three year gap between *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and the

release of their latest productions, *The Purge* (James DeMonaco, 2013) and *Pain and Gain* (Michael Bay, 2013), and previously discussed remakes of *Rosemary's Baby* and *Near Dark* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1987) have been dropped (Weintraub 2010) – although an adaptation of *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), which had been rejected after years in development, has recently been revived (Kroll 2014). An attempt to acquire the rights to the *Halloween* franchise for an additional reboot failed ('MrDisgusting' 2012). Plans to continue the rebooted franchises have also been so far unsuccessful. Jackie Earle Haley was reportedly contracted to play Krueger twice more, but no *Nightmare* film has gone into development and communications with New Line over the series' future have stalled (Topel 2014). Fuller and Form had previously announced that a *Friday the 13th* film had been scripted (in Weintraub 2010), but after long delays, Fuller stated that the project was 'dead – not happening' (see 'MrDisgusting' 2010). More recently, a complex deal occurred between Paramount and Warner Bros. over the franchise rights (see Kit & Masters 2013) and Platinum Dunes became involved once again. Brad Fuller stated via Twitter in July 2013 that he was preparing to produce a sequel once current projects were complete, but in January 2014, he reported that the company were still trying to develop a story (in Topel 2014).

After *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, the franchise's rights were passed to Lionsgate. The resulting film, *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (John Luessenhop, 2013) returns to the 1974 film's narrative universe, and opens with footage from the end of Hooper's film, with Sally Hardesty escaping the Sawyers' house. A siege between police and a substantial extended family led by Drayton Sawyer (played here by Bill Moseley, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*'s Chop Top) breaks out, leaving the entire family presumed dead, with the exception of a baby girl subsequently adopted by a local couple. As an adult, Heather (Alexandra Daddario) learns of her past and returns to Texas to collect an inheritance, where she encounters her cousin Jedidiah – Leatherface (Dan Yeager). The film rejects the narrative of Nispel's film, opting instead to focus on the original Sawyer family unit, although, like the 2003 film, it ultimately

adheres to the franchise emphasis on family loyalty as Heather eventually joins Leatherface and becomes a killer herself. A sequel was quickly announced following the film's release, although this statement has subsequently been retracted, despite still being described by producers as a possibility (see 'MrDisgusting' 2013a).

While there is no doubt that the films were successful on a financial level, all producing profits for Platinum Dunes (and, in the case of *Friday the 13th*, breaking box office records), that they have not generated further franchise instalments raises a question regarding their status as reboots. As discussed earlier in this chapter, work which has attempted to define the reboot emphasises not only the need to understand the concept as franchise-specific, but also as a text which is produced with the intention of *restarting* a particular series:

...simply put, a single film cannot be rebooted, only remade or followed up with a sequel. To describe a single unit as a reboot is not a cogent designation, as stand-alone revisions invariably fit into remake taxonomies already in discourse [...] It is important to emphasize that what we are discussing here is serial fiction rather than self-contained narrative units. (Proctor 2012: 3)

It cannot be argued that the films under discussion here are each part of a respective franchise, and that their origins are not single units. Even when recreating events from the first film, other instalments are taken as inspiration (most notably in *Friday the 13th*) or an overarching franchise narrative or character myth is used as a foundation (the importance of the family in *Chainsaw*, the implication of Krueger as molester in *Nightmare*). However, Proctor's suggestion that a reboot 'restarts' or 'forges' a new series within the franchise is one which is ultimately unrealised in the Platinum Dunes films. While the texts are certainly concerned with laying new narrative foundations, and it was intended that these would be followed up with further instalments, the fact that they have not been produced suggests to some extent that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* fail in their attempts to actually 'reboot' the franchise. However, I would argue that, not only

does this simply provide a challenge with regards to classifying the films themselves, but again serves to emphasise the difficulties with defining precise categorical labels for types of film-to-film adaptation. If an adaptation fails to achieve its purpose, this provides further complexities regarding its classification. Despite financial success, are these films failures *as reboots*? Does an intended reboot retrospectively become a remake once its attempt to restart a franchise is unsuccessful or effectively abandoned? Such questions only highlight the difficulties of constructing taxonomies of adaptation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Regardless of the films' categorisation, the new versions of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* are successful in redefining and rewriting origin stories, and ultimately in reaffirming the status of their antagonists as horror icons, a position previously challenged by later sequels which often portray them as comical villains rather than monstrous sources of fear. Reboots are often considered to negate or challenge the status of the original films in this rewriting, as more of an 'overwriting' which asks audiences to forget the prior franchise history. Yet as I have shown in this chapter, these adaptations largely rely on the necessity of audience memory and nostalgia for the originals, and of revelling in both the reveal and recollection of their monsters. This is evident not only in promotion for the films, but within the texts themselves by showing the characters as early as possible in their most iconic incarnations (e.g. Jason is seen in his hockey mask within the first half of *Friday the 13th*), or by simply asking the audience to remember them as the protagonists do (e.g. Krueger's "miss me?"). These recent versions do not, as assumed with most remakes and reboots, require that their viewers forget what came before, but rather that they remember those franchise origins and use the adaptations as a point of comparison to later instalments. Negating their origins would challenge their purpose.

In addition, continued re-versioning plays a part in canonising a series and its key characters, and thus the reboots contribute to the construction and furthering of franchise legacy and mythology. The existence of the text itself

confirms its 'worthiness' as a story to be retold, and the films retain the core motifs and iconography of their franchises while rewriting their origins, just as stories are told again and again with central similarities but surrounding differences. The Platinum Dunes reboots, while ambiguous in their categorisations and their appeal to fans, and therefore unlikely to ever be considered canonical in their own right, ultimately strengthen and affirm franchise mythology and status.

Chapter 5: Distinction and Difference in the Slasher Film Remake

In Chapter 4, I argued that the reboots of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* were connected not only by their association with a particular production company, but also by the specific strategies that company used to appeal to fans of the original film franchises, namely through reasserting the iconic status of the films' monsters and by invoking nostalgia and association with the original films. This chapter moves away from considering the connections and similarities between a particular group of remakes, and instead looks at their inconsistencies. *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* have frequently been included (erroneously, I would suggest, in the case of *Massacre*) in academic and critical discussions of the slasher film, a sub-generic cycle which represented a typical model for American horror cinema in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Alongside these films, a number of other slashers have been remade in the last decade, among them *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *Prom Night*, *April Fool's Day*, *My Bloody Valentine*, *The House on Sorority Row* (Mark Rosman 1983, remade as *Sorority Row*, Stewart Hendler 2009), *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night* (remade as *Silent Night*), and *Maniac*.

This list represents a disparate and diverse selection of films, which are only identifiable as a cycle in so much as their originals were associated as such by their inclusion in various studies of the slasher. They are also not as notably successful as the Platinum Dunes films – although 'success' is here difficult to define. The inconsistencies between the films' release patterns (from major, wide theatrical release, to limited release and, in more than one instance, direct-to-video), the lack of available information on DVD sales, and factors which distort box office takings (specifically, 3D surcharges for a film like *My Bloody Valentine*) mean that measuring relative success in financial terms is near impossible, and the differences between a big-budget, major release of a familiar title like *Halloween* and a straight-to-DVD remake of a less well known

cult film like *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night* make precise comparable analysis of critical reaction difficult. Regardless, even *Halloween*, arguably the film most akin to the likes of *Chainsaw* and *Elm Street* (in that it belongs to a popular, successful film franchise), grossed less in its theatrical run than each of the Platinum Dunes films (with the exception of *The Hitcher*) – \$58 million (boxofficemojo.com) – despite being released in a similar number of theatres.

This chapter takes as its starting point the disparity between the films. Rather than being promoted to potential audiences by their associations with their originals, as is the case with the Platinum Dunes reboots, most of these remakes instead emphasise elements other than their connections to a particular source, and are marked by attempts to differentiate each film not only from its original, but also each other. In many instances, this is perhaps in order to distinguish the remakes from the slasher film cycle, which, although originally associated with horror ‘classics’ such as *Halloween* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, is now often lamented as a generic, formulaic and unoriginal mode of horror following continued repetition and sequelisation in the 1980s and 1990s, before taking a turn to ‘postmodern’ irony in the wake of *Scream*. The makers of the remakes under consideration here used various strategies to assert individuality and credibility post-postmodern slasher, or else faced potential commercial and critical disappointment.

The chapter begins by briefly outlining the original cycle and its competing definitions and discourses, and considering how it developed in the mid-1990s, before moving on to provide an overview of a broad range of slasher remakes released in the last decade, many of which are significantly distanced from both their original sources and the other remakes. Two films which provide particularly interesting examples of distinction are then more closely considered, Rob Zombie’s *Halloween*, which I argue is an auteurist character study that both removes the supernatural mystery of Carpenter’s Michael Myers and aligns the film with an exploitation aesthetic familiar to Zombie’s work, and *Maniac*, which actively shifts from such an aesthetic evident in the original, to instead be best understood as an ‘arty-slasher’ appealing to

both horror and arthouse audiences through its stylish use of point-of-view (POV) camerawork and association with other, 'credible' forms of horror. Understanding the slasher remake as a cogent form of horror adaptation, and as part of a coherent and clearly demarked cycle is challenging, and this chapter outlines the reasons for that difficulty.

The Original Slasher Cycle and its Turn to the 'Postmodern'

The first challenge which arises in discussing the slasher remake is defining both the boundaries of the original cycle and the formula of the slasher film itself. Examples of the cycle are variably and interchangeably labelled as the slasher film, the stalker film (Dika 1987) and the woman-in-danger film (Ebert 1981); elsewhere attempts have been made to distinguish particular strains which seemingly ran concurrently within the sub-genre - Robin Wood uses the terms 'teenie-kill pic' (a label coined by *Variety* magazine [Hutchings 2004: 194]) and the 'violence against women movie', for example (1986: 173). *Psycho*, *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), and the work of *gialli* filmmakers such as Mario Bava and Dario Argento are influential precursors to the cycle, and the films listed in discussions of the slasher are equally diverse, including not only the expected *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, *Prom Night* et al, but also supernatural films (Sarah Trencansky [2001] includes *Hellraiser* [Clive Barker, 1987] and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*), rape-revenge (Ryan Lizardi [2010] uses *The Last House on the Left* as an example of the contemporary slasher remake), zombie films and body horror (Tania Modleski [1986] discusses *Dawn of the Dead* and David Cronenberg's *Rabid* [1977] and *Videodrome* [1982]), and even vampire films such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fran Rubel Kuzui, 1992) and *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987) (Gill 2002).

While labels and inclusions vary, the slasher film features at its core a number of key, identifiable tropes and themes which can be seen as central to the cycle. Yet even these provide no real point of generic fixity. At a basic level, a wide definition which enables classification of an extensive selection of titles, a slasher film might most simply be defined as one in which a singular,

psychotic killer stalks and murders a number of people. Yet this is insufficiently broad, offering no chance for excluding those early influences such as *Psycho* or *Peeping Tom*, and lacks formal specificity. More common is an attempt at definition which identifies the victims as a connected, young group, usually made up of teenagers (and predominantly women), a mysterious, masked or otherwise unidentified, usually male, killer who often wields a bladed weapon (thus lending the cycle its 'slasher' label), and becomes a murderer following some kind of trigger event (often seen in the establishing sequences of the film or in flashback at a later point). In addition, we might include tropes such as a heroic 'Final Girl' (Clover 1992) protagonist, a suburban setting, the employment of sudden jump-scares followed by quick, violent deaths, and the use of point-of-view camerawork from the killer's perspective.

Initial critical reaction and subsequent academic discussion of the cycle was largely negative, focusing on the films' cheapness and supposedly formulaic nature (for example Wood 1986), and more frequently, the apparent misogyny evident in its attacks on women (for example Ebert 1981, see also Nowell 2011: 17-18 and 226-229 for further examples and discussion). In time, however, more sympathetic writing on the slasher film appeared, and, while rarely championing the cycle (in fact, authors such as Carol Clover often went to some lengths to assert their interest as that of an academic, rather than as a fan), these studies re-evaluated gender relations in the films, and in particular moved to an understanding of the prominence and importance of the central female protagonist – most notably in the example of Clover's discussion of the Final Girl (1992) (see also Dika 1987, Trencansky 2001). More recently, Richard Nowell (2011) has shown that the recurrent accusation of the slasher cycle's misogyny is largely unfounded, at least with regards to the balance in the body count; the films feature as many (slightly more, in fact) male victims as female ones (not that this had gone entirely unnoticed previously; see Dika 1987: 90), and that producers and distributors went to great lengths to ensure the films appealed to a young female audience – a key demographic.

Bob Clark's 1974 film *Black Christmas* textually anticipated the slasher film cycle which started four years later with the success of *Halloween*, and indeed, as has been observed more recently, it directly influenced Carpenter's film. Clark has recounted, on more than one occasion, a discussion he had with John Carpenter regarding a potential sequel to *Black Christmas* in which the killer from the first film escapes the institution in which he has been held, and returns to his childhood home and the scene of his crime on Halloween night (see Constantineau 2010: 60 and Nowell 2011: 78). While *Black Christmas* achieved commercial success in its domestic Canadian market, becoming the second highest grossing nationally-produced film at the time, it did not do so well in the US. Released in the run up to Christmas in 1974, it performed poorly alongside significant releases (such as *The Man with the Golden Gun* [Guy Hamilton] and *The Godfather Part II* [Francis Ford Coppola]) in such a critical seasonal period, and was pulled from theatres; a limited re-release in 1975 was initially successful and the film was rolled out to additional screens, but it again faltered and was withdrawn (see Nowell 2011: 76-77). Nowell identifies Clark's film as the slasher cycle's 'pioneer production', followed by the enormously successful *Halloween* as its 'trailblazer hit' (Nowell 2011: 55). While acknowledging the importance of *Black Christmas*, Nowell's study locates the cycle's emergence in 1978 and the release of *Halloween*, through its rise to prominence in 1980 and apparent demise in 1981. This is a shorter period than is sometimes considered, and thus excludes later notable examples (and a full account of the later oversaturation of the slasher cycle) such as *The Slumber Party Massacre* (Amy Holden Jones, 1982) and *The House on Sorority Row*, although it is useful in succinctly capturing the height of the slasher's popularity and success, tracing the cycle from *Halloween* to the release of 'reinforcing hits' *Friday the 13th* and *Prom Night* in 1980 to the onslaught of 'carpetbagger cash-ins' in 1981: *My Bloody Valentine*, *Happy Birthday to Me* (J. Lee Thompson), *Hell Night* (Tom De Simone), *Graduation Day* (Herb Freed), *The Burning* (Tony Maylam), *Final Exam* (Jimmy Huston), and *Friday the 13th Part II* among them (Nowell 2011: 55).

Studies of the original slasher film cycle have naturally attempted to provide a clear definition, either based on generic tropes or by addressing form and narrative structure (see for example Dika 1987, Nowell 2011). But the resultant taxonomies vary wildly in their specificities (often to ensure the convenient classification of texts considered personally interesting or relevant to such studies) and are often so proscriptive as to exclude certain films which other critics may consider key to the cycle. The insistence of identifying victims as teenagers, for instance, should eliminate *My Bloody Valentine*, the protagonists of which are a group of 20-somethings, as well as a number of slashers featuring graduation-age college students. Focusing on the relationship between a single antagonist pitched against a Final Girl protagonist excludes films with multiple heroes such as *Slumber Party Massacre*, the occasional male protagonist or female antagonist (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, *Friday the 13th*) or more than one killer (*Scream*). Films which focus on the (identified) killer rather than the victim-as-protagonist are often left out or dismissed as 'serial killer films', although this is inconsistent – for example, *Silent Night, Deadly Night* is sometimes mentioned, while *Maniac* is usually shunned, yet both feature prominently in commercial (rather than academic) texts aimed at fans (Kerswell 2010, Rockoff 2002), suggesting they have frequently been understood as slasher films by the people who watch them. In her book *Horror* (2009), Brigid Cherry addresses the discrepancies in definitions and the problems that arise as a result. She asks:

[...] where should the line be drawn and who should draw it?
What percentage of the formula is essential, how many elements
can be varied – and by how much – for a film to still be classed
as a slasher, and at what point might a film stop being a slasher
and fall outside the genre? What would it be labelled then?
(Cherry 2009: 26)

Rather than attempting to answer such questions, particularly if this was to involve providing an additional, further complicating definition, it is instead more productive to take the ambiguity surrounding the slasher as a starting point for understanding its evolution and innovations.

The release of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984 marked a change in the dominant mode and direction of American horror cinema throughout the mid-1980s into the 1990s. Firstly, new instalments of franchises began to increase in their numbers and frequency of release. Secondly, the franchise villain – represented chiefly by Michael Myers (*Halloween*), Jason Vorhees, and Freddy Krueger – became a superhuman or supernatural force (or continued to be so, in Krueger’s case), in plot points which crudely bring them back to ‘life’ (or something like it) at the beginning of each new series instalment (Vorhees’ body is electrocuted, a dog urinates on Krueger’s remains, Myers awakens from a coma, and so on). These two factors were clearly related, keeping each film’s narrative ‘increasingly open-ended to allow for the possibility of countless sequels’ (Modleski 1986: 289). Andrew Tudor has noted that, while horror has functioned cyclically throughout its history, the ‘reliance on rapid sequences of sequels, which, in their marketing, are offered as precisely that’ was a ‘genuinely distinctive feature of 1980s and 1990s horror’ (Tudor 2002: 106), and that the sequel became not just a convention of the genre at this time but ‘expected and embraced by a generically competent horror audience’ (Tudor 2002: 107). Horror began to incorporate comedic elements more prominently as well, through the connection of humour to gore and ‘splatter’ (for example, the increasingly comic tone of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films as discussed in the previous chapter), but more notably through self-reflexivity and appealing to a horror audience’s familiarity with genre conventions. This reached its peak with the release of *Scream* in 1996.¹⁶ After years of franchise sequels and variations on the slasher subgenre, Wes Craven’s film reignited both the cycle and wider critical interest surrounding it (Valerie Wee describes the film as ‘legitimizing’ the slasher [Wee 2005: 58]), and shifted academic discourses of horror.

While changes in the genre throughout the decade prior had occasionally been aligned with theories of postmodernism (see for example Modleski 1986) (in a reflection of a general critical tendency at the time towards understanding

¹⁶ *Scream*’s director, Wes Craven, had of course pre-empted this development with 2004’s highly self-reflexive, but less successful, *New Nightmare*.

irony and intertextuality in cinema as explicitly postmodern qualities), the arrival of *Scream* invited a raft of critical and academic discussion which labelled the film a 'postmodern' slasher, a term invoked to suggest a particular level of pastiche, self-reflexivity and inter-generic referencing. 'Postmodernism' was frequently used to describe this particular period of horror cinema, without much interrogation of what the term might mean on a wider theoretical or historical level (see for example Wee 2005 & 2006, Wells 2000, Worland 2007). This prompted an interrogation of the use of the term in a 2002 essay by Andrew Tudor, who observed little connection between the term's inference to the films' textual and stylistic attributes and the actual application of theoretical frameworks of postmodernism. Rather than questioning exactly how 'correct' the term might be, though, it is perhaps more useful to understand the connections between slasher films, post-*Scream*, in the way in which it is intended for critical and audience understanding - notably, it indicates allusion and pastiche, generic hybridity, self-reflexivity and an appeal to an audience familiar with the conventions of the genre, and, in the case of the *Scream* series, deconstructing and subverting 'the rules' of the slasher film (chiefly: no drinking, no sex, or you die). That *Scream*'s script references the 'horror film' or 'scary movies' rather than specifically the slasher film, taking the two to be synonymous, suggests just how prominent the formula became in American horror in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Given that the commentary on 'the rules' and encyclopaedic references to the original slasher cycle are the elements most frequently attributed to *Scream*'s postmodern nature, it is interesting that this is lacking in all of the other films with which the series is often associated (among them *I Know What You Did Last Summer* Jim Gillespie, 1997, *Urban Legend*, and their sequels). Peter Hutchings suggests a number of ways in which we might think of these late-1990s slasher films as being connected regardless of *Scream*'s atypical nature; they boast higher production values and sharper writing and characterisation than their late-1970s/early-1980s inspirations, they often feature actors recognisable (and thus appealing to a teen audience) from US

television, they are less concerned with the 'moral value of virginity' (characters often have sex, and in the case of *Cherry Falls* [Geoffrey Wright, 2000], the killer actively stalks virgins), and they feature female protagonists who are less 'isolated' than the Final Girls of the 1980s, an element which allows for more considered representations of the dynamics of friendship and romance (Hutchings 2004: 213-214). The foregrounding of features such as self-reflexivity in discussions of the slasher film at this time has, Hutchings argues, 'led to a marginalisation of other elements in the films which are as important, if not more so, than their 'postmodern' qualities' (Hutchings 2004: 215).

Hutchings' comments on the postmodern slasher (which I use then, admittedly, as a simple term for identification rather than as an exact indication of how effectively the films might employ postmodern elements) underline his sentiments on the vagueness of attempts to label and define the first slasher film cycle (discussed earlier in this section). Rather than being necessarily problematic, however, we can see such ambiguity as an opportunity to consider how the cycle evolves, and to observe and analyse differences between the films, as well as their similarities, something which most studies choose to ignore as the desire to provide precise definitions takes precedence over understanding distinctions. Such critical obsession with formula and likeness is problematic:

Even for those accounts which seek to engage with the slasher as a complex and perhaps even progressive horror format, this can lead to a sense that these films are essentially the same, a sense remarkably similar to that exhibited by those unequivocally negative critiques of the slasher that view it simply as a mindless, artless and exploitative mass-cultural product. (Hutchings 2004: 194-195)

That the slasher is often dismissed as formulaic, a 'mindless, artless and exploitative mass-cultural product', aligns it within the horror genre alongside the recent cycle of remakes, themselves much maligned and critiqued (as I have shown elsewhere in this study), and dismissed as homogenized and derivative commercial products. The slasher remake, then, might be understood

by many critics as the *lowest* incarnation of a 'low' form of a 'low' genre, and critical response to the cycle certainly seems to suggest so (this is especially noticeable in the discourses of 'pointlessness' considered in chapter 3). Responding to Hutchings' call for an approach that considers slashers' differences instead of obsessing over their cyclical similarities and connections, the rest of this chapter surveys the slasher remake in order to do just that. Rather than dismissing the remake as needlessly derivative or over-reliant on a particular formula, discussing the films as a cycle instead emphasises the disparate nature of such a group of films, and suggests that rather than exploiting what has gone before, these films in fact represent generic innovation, contributing in part to the recent evolution of the horror genre.

The Slasher Remake, 2003 – 2013: An Overview

It is important to note at this stage, of course, that the slasher film never really 'went away', and that the remakes I will move on to discuss in this section represent only a part of the slasher cycle in the years since *Scream* (just as, on a wider level, remakes do not represent the majority of modern genre output). Firstly, a new raft of sequels to the postmodern slasher were released – *Scream 2* and *Scream 3* (with a fourth instalment in 2011), *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (Danny Cannon, 1998) and the direct-to-video *I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer* (Sylvain White, 2006), *Urban Legends: Final Cut* (John Ottman, 2000) and *Urban Legends: Bloody Mary* (Mary Lambert, 2005). The original franchises continued to produce sequels as well, even in the wake of *Scream* and prior to being remade – *Halloween H20* (Steve Miner, 1998), *Halloween: Resurrection* (Rick Rosenthal, 2002), and an additional *Friday the 13th* film, *Jason X*, as well as the long-anticipated crossover with the *Elm Street* series, *Freddy Vs. Jason*. Additionally, there were notable singular entries into the cycle: *Cherry Falls*, *Valentine* (Jamie Blanks, 2001), *Cry_Wolf* (Jeff Wadlow, 2005), *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (Jonathan Levine, 2006), *Hatchet* (Adam Green, 2006) and *See No Evil* (Gregory Dark, 2006), the final two films both initiating new slasher franchises (*Hatchet II*, Adam Green, 2010; *Hatchet III*, BJ McDonnell, 2013; and the upcoming *See No Evil 2*, The Soska Sisters, 2014).

The remakes do not dominate the cycle or overshadow its more 'original' entries then, but they do play a significant part in its development.

They also represent some of the more innovative examples in the genre, in an effort to distinguish themselves from their source texts, I would argue. Discussing the likes of *My Bloody Valentine*, *Halloween*, *Prom Night* etc. together makes sense in the case of the originals; if not as a result of any specific similarities which resulted in critiques of their formulaic nature, then because they resolutely marked a particular moment in the genre, and are largely seen to define American horror cinema at the turn of the 1980s and pre-empt the model of what was to come for the next 15 years. But discussing the remakes in a similar way is much more difficult. Their broader disparities mean drawing connections and observing patterns (aside from their relationship to the originals) is challenging. Furthermore, many remakes of horror types other than the slasher adopt slasher tropes, or vice versa. This section provides a chronological overview of slasher remakes (and remakes influenced by slashers) in an attempt to better understand some of their more interesting distinctions.

Taking into consideration films which have been understood as an influence on the slasher film, the first remakes of films connected to the cycle can be located at the start of the remake boom in 2003 with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (or even pre-empting that, *Psycho* in 1998). The original *Chainsaw* and its remake have been discussed as part of the cycle, mostly with regards to protagonist Sally's position as Clover's prototypical Final Girl (1992: 36), and her interpretation in the remake's equivalent character of Erin (see Totaro 2003, Kuersten 2005, Lizardi 2010), but its inclusion is debatable due to its rural setting, multiple killers, and a lack of many recognisable stylistic tropes; its association tends to be instead with the new American horror film of the 1970s (considered in depth in chapter 6). Also occasionally included as part of the original cycle is Dennis Donnelly's 1978 film *The Toolbox Murders*. The first half of the film certainly has claim to slasher credentials; it features a masked killer stalking the residents of a Los Angeles apartment block and murdering

women with tools (a screwdriver, hammer, and nail gun), but it is usually excluded due to the shift in the film's plot towards more of a mystery/crime thriller narrative with an exploitation edge to its murders. Tobe Hooper's 2004 remake opts for a focus on the mystery elements, with an occultist storyline which largely renders the film's potential slasher status void.

Conversely, a number of remakes have emphasised stylistic and formal elements of the slasher in order to update their generic connections or more clearly align a film with the contemporary horror genre. *House of Wax* (Jaume Collet-Serra, 2005) shares little more than a title with the macabre Vincent Price shocker (André de Toth, 1953) on which it is based, and utilises the 'mysterious killer' trope as an opportunity to showcase elaborate murder sequences (notably that of celebrity 'It-girl' Paris Hilton, whose presence in the film is exploited in a deliberate parody of her then-notorious sex tape during her death). This strategy is more obvious, however, in *When A Stranger Calls*. The original film opens with a tense sequence in which a woman is plagued by threatening phone calls revealed to be coming from inside the house in which she is babysitting. The stalker's identity is revealed soon into the narrative, and the remainder of the film plays out as a crime drama. But West's remake bypasses this plot entirely, instead expanding the concept of the first ten minutes to fill the film's entire feature time, concealing the killer's identity and focusing on him terrorising the babysitter over the phone, adding the deaths of her friend and a housemaid to increase the body count. The strategy of changing or enhancing a remake's sub-generic elements is not restricted to the slasher film; as I show in chapter 7, the rape-revenge remake adopted torture-porn tropes to more clearly align the films with existing trends in horror, making the film marketable to a contemporary genre audience. In the case of a film like *When A Stranger Calls*, adapting the original to something more akin to a slasher enables its promotion as such to a teen audience familiar with its conventions following the success of *Scream*; indeed, the trailer exploits such connections by focusing on the menacing phone calls, opening with an ominous shot of a ringing telephone, and following with Jill's (Camilla Belle) conversation

with the killer, an equivalent to both *Scream*'s trailer and opening scene where Casey (Drew Barrymore) is terrorised by a mystery caller (*Scream*, in turn, references the original *When A Stranger Calls* in such scenes).

Accordingly, given the original's status as a prototypical slasher film, the first 'slasher-to-slasher' remake is *Black Christmas*. Glen Morgan's update, however, eschews much of the menacing, dark tone of Bob Clark's original, instead erring toward camp and black comedy (which is especially apparent in the dialogue). Despite the film's oddly comic tone, the violence in *Black Christmas* is gruesome. The police find killer Billy Lenz (Robert Mann), after he has murdered his mother, eating angel-shaped 'cookies' he has cut from the flesh of her back, and he has a propensity for plucking and eating the eyeballs of his victims (presumably implying a connection to his voyeurism, both as a child watching his mother and her lover, and as an adult hiding in the walls of the sorority house after escaping from the asylum he had been held in). The psychotic killer is given a backstory which both expands the narrative and provides a motivation for his actions. Through flashbacks, it is established that Billy was abused by his mother as a child, first neglected and locked away in the attic of their home (which later becomes a sorority house), then raped by her at 12, an incestuous union which results in the birth of his sister/daughter, Agnes (Dean Friss), who joins him in his later killing spree.

The addition or expansion of such backstories is commonplace in contemporary horror. While earlier serial killer films (*Psycho*, *Peeping Tom*) and a number of films in the original slasher cycle (*Maniac*, *Prom Night*) often made reference to or showed traumatic childhood events as a means to provide killers with motivation, this became more prominent (and more detailed) throughout the 2000s. This is perhaps most evident in remakes (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th*, *Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *House of Wax*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Maniac* all expand such backgrounds for their antagonists) because of the opportunities for comparison with the original film. Yet it is present elsewhere in the genre too (and not solely in relation to serial killers). *Hatchet*, *Cherry Falls*, *May* (Lucky McKee, 2002),

Darkness Falls (Jonathan Liebesman, 2003), *An American Haunting* (Courtney Solomon, 2005), *Boogeyman* (Steven T. Kay, 2005), *Silent Hill* (Cristophe Gans, 2006), *The Messengers* (Danny & Oxide Pang, 2007), *Trick 'r' Treat* (Michael Dougherty, 2007) and *The Uninvited* (Charles & Thomas Guard, 2009), among others, all feature exposition by way of traumatic childhood events. In *Scream*, killer Billy (Skeet Ulrich) refuses to provide a motive: "Did we ever find out why Hannibal Lecter liked to eat people? I don't think so. See it's a lot scarier when there's no motive, Sid"; a decade later, in *Hannibal Rising* (Peter Webber, 2007) we learn that Hannibal saw his sister cannibalised by Nazis as a child. *Hannibal Rising*, Philip L. Simpson argues, encourages audience understanding of Lecter, 'an otherwise incomprehensible icon of evil, as the product of his environment' (Simpson 2010: 132-133). This development exemplifies the contemporary shift toward explanation and motivation in works of fiction and real-life adaptations, Simpson argues, following a media fascination in the 1980s and 1990s not only with serial killers' actions, but also their backgrounds and daily lives. Many contemporary slasher films emulate this tendency.

Sarah Constantineau (2010), who reads *Black Christmas* in the context of national genre cinemas (specifically, the changes to the ideology of the more liberal Canadian original as it is adapted for an American audience) argues that the addition of Lenz's abuse subplot represents a conservative, revisionist approach which emphasises the importance of a 'normal' family upbringing, and sees this as being in direct opposition to the feminist pro-choice message of the original, found in the storyline dealing with the tension between Jess (Olivia Hussey) and her boyfriend Peter (Lier Dullea) as they argue over her right to an abortion (Constantineau 2010: 61). While I would agree with Constantineau that abortion, as a contentious issue for the American majority, is a less appealing subject for US audiences, this ignores both the reach the original had (although not particularly successful, it was released in the US), and the international release patterns of the remake. Furthermore, the plot detailing Billy's background is an *addition* to the narrative; the *replacement* for the tension

between Jess and Peter is a 'love triangle' scenario in which Megan (Jessica Harmon) tries to keep a sex tape she has made with Kyle (Oliver Hudson) hidden from his girlfriend, Kelli (Katie Cassidy). This is an undoubtedly less controversial subplot, but I would argue that it is employed in order to maintain an element of suspense. Repeating the Jess/Peter relationship would indicate immediately who the suspected killer is (Jess eventually kills Peter, believing him to be the murderer – which is revealed to be incorrect at the very end of the film), and thus changing the narrative leaves the villain's identity ambiguous for much of the film.

The following year marks the release of *Halloween* (which I will discuss in detail in the following section), its relative success initiating further remakes of slashers which came after Carpenter's original film. The first notable example is *Prom Night*. With the exception of being set at its titular event, Nelson McCormick's remake bears little resemblance to the 1980 film in narrative terms. The original film opens with a sequence in which a children's game goes horribly wrong, causing the death of young Robin (Tammy Bourne), an accident which the others agree to keep a secret. Six years later, on the day of their high school prom, the group are terrorised by an anonymous stalker, and at the event are killed one by one. A final showdown between protagonist (and Robin's sister) Kim (Jamie Lee Curtis) and the killer reveals him to be her brother Alex (Michael Tough), seeking retribution for Robin's death which, it transpires, he had witnessed. This revenge plot is eschewed in *Prom Night* (2008). The film opens with protagonist Donna (Brittany Snow) finding her brother and father dead, and witnessing her mother's murder. Three years later, this killer escapes his institution and stalks Donna and her friends at their prom. There is no ambiguity here surrounding the killer's identity. The first film suggests a number of possible culprits in order to keep the audience guessing (and thus heighten suspense), sex offender Leonard Murch (who had been falsely imprisoned for Robin's death), the school bully Lou (David Mucci), and 'creepy' janitor Sykes (Robert Silverman) among them, all of which are revealed as 'red herrings' once Kim recognises her brother's eyes through his balaclava.

In the remake, the killer is identified early in the narrative as Richard Fenton (Johnathon Schaech), a former teacher at Donna's school who developed an obsession with her at thirteen, stalked her and subsequently murdered her family after being fired. Fenton's guilt is never in question. The script shuns any kind of 'whodunit' element, and the murderer is clearly seen during his attacks on Donna's friends – POV is only adopted to suggest where in the venue he is hiding and watching the teens from, rather than concealing his identity.

Despite the remake's foregrounding of paedophilic lust (Fenton's fixation with Donna is clearly identified as being both romantic and sexual in his declarations of love and when he tells Detective Winn (Idris Elba) "I want to touch her"), the tone of the film remains remarkably 'light' in comparison to other examples in the cycle. There is little emphasis on the suffering of any of the victims (beyond Donna's response to the murder of her mother), and murder scenes are relatively bloodless; fatal blows often occur outside of the frame, shots of Fenton stabbing or slitting someone's throat are distorted through glass or plastic, and rapid editing techniques ensure the camera never lingers on a victim, cutting quickly back to the murderer. While nearly all of the other remakes under discussion here were granted R certificates by the MPAA (with the exception of *Maniac* and *April Fool's Day*, which were unrated), *Prom Night* was rated PG-13, and reviewers were quick to notice its relative 'bloodlessness' and focus on teenage life (Leydon 2008, Catsoulis 2008). This, clearly, is a strategy employed to produce a horror film with marketable appeal to as broad an audience as possible, one which incorporates younger filmgoers including teenage girls.

Richard Nowell shows how the original film, despite being retrospectively understood as a violent slasher, was actually similarly tame, and was marketed to young teenage girls (a key market demographic) through its extended disco dancing sequences (on which the marketing campaign focused in order to align it with the likes of *Saturday Night Fever* [John Badham, 1977] and *Xanadu* [Robert Greenwald, 1980]), the focus on relationships and navigating romantic problems (from the girls' perspective), and the significance of prom as a rite of

passage¹⁷ (Nowell 2011: 178-180). The remake adopts a relatively similar approach – the preparations for prom are from the perspective of Donna and her friends, and the trailer spends almost equal time focusing on the anticipation and excitement over the event as it does suggesting the film’s horror credentials. There is a strong focus on the girls’ friendships and romantic relationships. It is implied that the teen couples are sexually active, but this is presented as unproblematic, everyday behaviour (unlike in the original, where the girls discuss Kelly’s [Marybeth Rubens] boyfriend Drew [Jeff Wincott] pressurising her for sex); their sexuality is normalised in direct contrast to the non-normative desires of paedophile Fenton, and bully Chrissy (Brianne Davis), who taunts Donna over her stalker’s desires and insults Lisa’s (Dana Davis) revealing dress. Arguments with boyfriends instead focus on the potential stability of their relationships once the group split to go to college. A further appeal to teen audiences is through the film’s cast of relatable young stars recognisable from popular American television shows – Dana Davis (*Heroes*, NBC 2006-2010), Scott Porter (*Friday Night Lights*, Universal 2006-2011), Kellan Lutz and Jessica Stroup (*90210*, CBS 2008-2013), and Brittany Snow (*American Dreams*, NBC 2002-2005). This casting strategy is common not only in horror remakes, but in the genre more widely since the mid-1990s. These elements contribute to the positioning of the new teen slasher film as strategically appealing to young female audiences, a key demographic, through a combination of horror credentials, star appeal, romance, and high-school drama in what might be best understood as a horror/teenage soap opera hybrid (Hutchings 2004: 215, Wee 2006: 60). A similar tactic is also employed in the straight-to-video remake of parodic slasher *April Fool’s Day*, released the same year as *Prom Night*.

In 2009, three slasher remakes were released – the very successful *Friday the 13th*, most notable in terms of innovation for adapting elements of the first three films in the franchise, *Sorority Row*, which very loosely interprets the

¹⁷ Despite its R rating, *Carrie* also deals with similar themes, focusing on teenaged female protagonists, a high school setting and the significance of prom – showing how key horror films outside of the slasher model also aimed to appeal to young women.

plot of *The House on Sorority Row*, and *My Bloody Valentine*, which employed emerging technology to increase its audience appeal. 3D had begun to regain popularity in the mid-2000s, but was largely associated with occasional 'event' releases, IMAX, and animation. The technology had of course been popular with horror audiences in the 1950s, but had since become outdated, relegated to the occasional sequel in the 1980s and 1990s (*Friday the 13th Part III* and *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*; the technological enhancement justifying their production, to some extent). A limited release, the second remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (Jeff Broadstreet, 2006), had re-experimented with horror in 3D earlier in the decade, but *My Bloody Valentine*'s wide release and relative box office success (\$51.5m, boxofficemojo.com) reignited serious interest in the media's potential for genre cinema, and was followed by 3D horror films *The Final Destination* (David R. Ellis, 2009) and *Final Destination 5* (Steven Quale, 2011), *Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010), remakes of *Fright Night* (Craig Gillespie, 2011) and *Piranha*, a sequel to the latter, *Piranha 3DD* (John Gulager, 2012) *Shark Night* (David R. Ellis, 2011), and *Texas Chainsaw 3D*, among others.



Figure 4: *My Bloody Valentine*: 'nothing says "date movie" like a 3D ride to hell!'

My Bloody Valentine inverts the supposedly common slasher trope of the POV shot, using it to exploit the 3D technology; rather than seeing anything from the killer's perspective, the audience's view is instead repeatedly aligned with that of the victim's eye line as they are attacked. The camera aims straight down the barrel of a gun, a tree branch smashes through the windscreen in a car crash where the viewer is aligned with the driver, the sharp tip of the murderer's pickaxe is framed front and centre as he pushes a victim's head toward it, impaling his eye. While reviews of the film were largely ambivalent or negative, a number of critics praised its use of technology and likened it to 'fun' horror cinema of past decades, despite its gore. Kim Newman described the 3D as 'a perfect add-on gimmick for a funhouse horror film set down a mine. After the relentless downers of recent torture porn flicks, this old-fashioned horror is surprisingly endearing' (Newman 2009: 10). Drawing attention to the 3D in this way, using the technology for novelty purposes and offering a new element of 'old-fashioned fun' is, as far as mainstream 3D releases are concerned, an approach almost exclusive to the horror genre. Engaging the audience by deliberately 'breaking the fourth wall' to shock or excite is markedly different from using 3D for immersive purposes, enhancing the image and CGI, and improving depth of field, significant strategies which films such as *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) employed at the time.

Additional developments can be seen in the final two slasher remakes of the last decade. First, *Maniac*, which incorporates an art film sensibility and features innovative use of POV camerawork, and is considered in detail in the final section of this chapter. Second, *Silent Night*, Steven C. Miller's remake of the minor cult hit *Silent Night Deadly Night*.¹⁸ Appropriately, as this film marks the last in this discussion, Miller openly promotes his slasher fandom, and claimed he wanted return to what he saw as the cycle's 'roots': combining a 'cool and scary looking' masked killer, a recognisable holiday setting and a humorous edge (in Airdo 2012). The film retains a bloody, violent sensibility and

¹⁸ *Silent Night, Deadly Night* caused controversy across the USA on its release in 1984. It was picketed by parenting groups, who took umbrage with the portrayal of Santa Claus as a killer. Protestors were so successful that they persuaded distributor Tri-Star to pull the film from theatres (*Going to Pieces*, 2009).

a dark streak (in the opening sequence, the killer Santa murders a petulant child with a cattle prod, later, a porn actress is forced through a wood chipper in reference to *Fargo* [Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, 1996]), but removes two scenes of attempted rape ('I just don't particularly like them', he replied on Twitter to a critic who told him 'respect'¹⁹), introduces a sympathetic female protagonist (Jaime King) instead of telling the story from the killer's perspective as the original does, and Jayson Rothwell's script is laced with black humour and one-liners. Miller's film represents both a return to traditional slasher tropes and engagement with the sensibilities of self-reflexive horror.

This section has outlined a number of differences among key slasher remakes, and observed ways in which they are representative of innovation within the horror genre. The disparities between the films are such that it is difficult to identify patterns and similarities in many instances. However, it is interesting that the release of the remakes follows a similar pattern to that identified by Richard Nowell of the originals. The 'pioneer production' of *Black Christmas* is followed by the 'trailblazer hit' *Halloween*, which in turn inspires the release of 'reinforcing hits' in *Prom Night* and *Friday the 13th*, leading to a (here, smaller) range of 'carpetbagger cash-ins': *My Bloody Valentine*, *Sorority Row*, *Silent Night* et al. The inconsistencies between these films, I would argue, only provide further support for the suggestion that we should understand the original films' individualities and move beyond attempted subgeneric taxonomies. While we might identify these films as 'slashers', it is usually on the understanding of a number of separate components, rather than a film's whole. The last two sections of this chapter use the examples of *Halloween* and *Maniac* to support this argument with more considered analysis of key films.

The Slasher Remake as Auteurist Exploitation Film: Rob Zombie and *Halloween*

Halloween is similar to the remakes discussed in the previous chapter in that it provides an opportunity to reboot a largely successful (if ultimately creatively

¹⁹ See: <https://twitter.com/stevencmiller/status/275874686091554816>

flailing) horror franchise. There were eight instalments produced prior to Rob Zombie's remake, beginning with Carpenter's seminal 1978 film and finishing with *Halloween: Resurrection* five years prior to the series' return to its origins. As with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, there is also a significant focus on 'filling in' the story surrounding the monster/villain's origins. In fact, this element in *Halloween* is so emphasised that it occupies a significant proportion of the film's running time, providing an extended background to Michael Myers' childhood for the first thirty seven minutes, and not picking up the main story of Carpenter's film – that of an adult Michael returning to his terrorise his home town some fifteen years after he murdered his sister – until almost half way through the narrative. Expanding an antagonist's background is common not only in the franchise reboot (or attempted reboot) but also numerous other remakes, including several of the films considered in this chapter. The difference with *Halloween* is that while providing a narrative function, the backstory here also offers the opportunity for writer/director Rob Zombie to assert an authorial voice over the text, setting the film apart from the numerous other slasher remakes and aligning it with a particular auteurist aesthetic.

Studies of the original *Halloween* have often observed that Michael is presented as non-human in his strength and determination, a status which is enhanced by his repeated resurrections in the franchise's sequels, but is certainly implied in Carpenter's film. Myers is variably described as 'an ambiguous ghostly figure' (Worland 2008: 233), 'near superhuman' (Tudor 1989: 68), a 'cosmic force' (Phillips 2012: 144) and one of the slasher franchises' 'supernatural or quasi-supernatural entities' (Hutchings 2004: 207). He is even listed in the film's credits ambiguously, as 'the shape'. The 1978 film ends with protagonist Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) defeating Myers (Nick Castle/Tony Moran) with the help of Myers' psychiatrist, Sam Loomis (Donald Pleasance), who shoots him. Michael falls from a balcony, and is shown, apparently dead, sprawled on the ground below; but when Loomis looks back, he is gone. This ending, Matt Hills argues, 'implies his supernatural

omnipresence...where is he? *What* is he?' (Hills 2005: 27) Conversely, the remake goes to great lengths to show Michael as human (helped by his sheer size and bulk - as an adult, he is played by 6'8" former wrestler Tyler Mane, so his strength requires no supernatural explanation). It had become more common to show killers as 'normal' people in the wake of the *Scream* series, in which murderers, without superhuman 'powers', were connected to protagonist Syd (and usually someone close to her) (Trencansky 2001: 71). *Halloween* further evolves this aspect of postmodern horror and promotes Michael to protagonist status.

Zombie's film achieves this by following Michael's life in a three act structure. Firstly, we are introduced to Michael on Halloween at ten years old (Daeg Faerch), a troubled boy with a miserable home life. His older sister Judith (Hanna Hall) neglects him, his mother Deborah (Sheri Moon Zombie) dotes on him but school bullies torment him over her job at the local strip club, and her partner Ronnie (William Forsythe) is an abusive alcoholic who leers over Judith, continuously ridicules Michael and constantly fights with Deborah, causing Michael's baby sister Boo to scream relentlessly. Michael tortures animals (he dissects a pet rat in the opening scenes and his school principal finds a dead cat in his bag along with a series of gruesome photographs), a habit child psychologist Sam Loomis (Malcolm McDowell) cautions is an "early warning sign". Loomis' warning is prophetic, and Michael later that day beats a school bully to death. That night, Myers brutally murders Judith, her boyfriend, and Ronnie, and takes Boo outside to wait for his mother. The second act is set in Smith's Grove sanatorium, where Michael is held, and shows his descent into withdrawn, silent madness, hiding behind an array of hand-made masks, witnessed by Loomis during interviews and recordings. Finally, Michael escapes and makes his way back to Haddonfield to find 'Boo' (who is now, of course Laurie Strode [Scout Taylor-Compton], a plot point only originally developed in *Halloween II* (Rick Rosenthal, 1981) in order to connect Myers and Laurie).

Critics gloss Myers' expanded backstory as an attempt to explain his psychotic behaviour, in direct opposition with the intent of Carpenter's film:

The original movie implied that Michael was a bad seed, born into a picket-fence small town, but this gives him a white-trash chainlink-fence background, littered with tell-tales from serial killer biopics – an absent father, a pole-dancing mom, neglectful sibling, bullying classmates, tortured animals, obsession with masks [...] a kid being nudged towards evil. (Newman 2007: 66)

Whereas Carpenter's movie sustains a fantastic hesitation as to the nature of its uncanny event by refusing to provide a tangible explanation for Michael Myers – the origin of his iniquity, the nature of his physical power, the motivation for his murderous actions – *Zombie's* picture instead opts to account for the killer's evil using pop psychology. (Nelson 2010: 106)

However, providing an insight to Michael's childhood, while perhaps giving an indication of some events which act as a catalyst for his actions, does not provide an exact explanation of his 'evil', which, it is suggested, has always been a part of Michael. Rather than clarify why Michael is the way he is, his behaviour as a child is only further evidence that he is not only completely human, but evil in a way that is entirely *unexplainable*. Deborah is stunned to learn about Michael's torture of the cat, exclaiming "but Michael loves animals!", and believes and comforts her son early in the film when he tells her about his pet rat: "Elvis died. I had to flush him". There is no indication that she is aware of his strange habits, beyond occasionally getting into trouble at school. Her later depression once Michael retreats into silence at the hospital is as much the result of her not understanding as a response to his behaviour, and her eventual suicide, as she watches a home video of Michael playing and laughing with her in better days, emphasises his actions as those of someone absolutely human ("Michael's not a monster", Loomis earlier comforts her, as if to underline the point). *Halloween* works on the principle that psychopathy cannot be explained. As the director states:

[...] the reality is he would be a true psychopath, he has no concept of what he's doing. He'll kill his sister, and then talk about how much he loves his sister. That's the reality of a psychopath, they're not always scary, sometimes they're charming and funny, maybe it's someone who murders people; maybe it's someone who just does not feel guilty about ripping off elderly people from retirement funds. That's psychotic behaviour. (Zombie, in interview with 'Mr Disgusting', 2007)

Michael's psychopathic behaviour contributes to his portrayal as truly human, and the film reminds us of both aspects of his nature in numerous ways. It is also evident in how frequently we see his face, despite his obsession with his childhood masks, and even once he retrieves the iconic blank rubber mask which he dons as an adult, he is often without it – most powerfully, in a scene near the film's end where he tries to get Laurie to understand their connection by showing her an old photograph of them together, removing his mask to show her his face. After Laurie seemingly kills him in the final shot, the credits begin, each title intercut with short clips of young Michael in home movies, realigning the relentless killer who spends the final act of the film slaughtering Laurie's friends and family with this 'charming and funny' little boy. The connection is even made in references to Carpenter's film. Loomis' book detailing his experience with Michael is titled 'The Devil's Eyes', in clear homage to Donald Pleasance's monologue from the original. But when giving the equivalent speech, McDowell's Loomis asserts "these are the eyes of a psychopath", further disassociating Myers from the demonic or supernatural.

Andrew Patrick Nelson acknowledges that Michael's evil is 'ultimately unexplainable', but asks 'so why the lengthy, gruesome prologue if the film is going to retain the original's premise about the unintelligibility of evil?' (Nelson 2010: 108). The answer to this is not, as he and others see it, to try to explain, or necessarily linked to a sense of 'knowingness' which the film might offer an audience. It is instead an opportunity for Rob Zombie to make 'his' *Halloween*. Zombie, who 'reputedly signed up for this project because he couldn't bear the thought of anyone who cared less tackling the [remake]' (Newman 2007) has spoken in interviews of how Carpenter had told him to 'go for it, make it your own movie' (in *Re-Imagining Halloween*), and that the remake, which he had at one point conceptualised as two films, ultimately became '50% me, 50% John Carpenter. Young Michael's world was all me [...] but once we get to Haddonfield with Laurie Strode, that was me filtering through the "John Carpenter land"' (in Stephenson, 2009). Clearly, implying Michael's behaviour to have been influenced by his troubled youth does not require half the running

time of the film. Instead, the first 50 minutes, showing his childhood and his time at Smith's Grove contributes to a clear positioning of *Halloween* as a 'Rob Zombie film'.

The trailer actively promotes the remake as part of a Rob Zombie 'brand', emphasising the filmmaker's involvement over the connection to Carpenter's film, a strategy unusual for marketing remakes. While there is often an association with the filmmakers' other successful projects (e.g. 'from the director of *The Hills Have Eyes*', 'from producer Michael Bay and the director of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'), it is uncommon for the director to be identified as a selling point, even in the case of a potentially recognisable name like Alexandre Aja. The trailer for *Halloween*, conversely, positions Rob Zombie's name as a main attraction, with no clarification as to his exact role in the film's making: 'this summer, Rob Zombie unleashes a unique vision of a legendary tale'. Similarly, the posters place his name above the title, identifying *Halloween* as 'a Rob Zombie film' (see Figure 5). While this can in part be attributed to the totality of his involvement (he is credited as director, writer and co-producer, in addition to music supervisor), it is clear that *Halloween* was sold to a particular audience sector on account of its identification as a an example of Zombie's 'unique vision', despite only being his third feature (following *House of 1000 Corpses* in 2003 and *The Devil's Rejects* in 2005). That Zombie's name should be considered enough to sell a horror film does have some basis in his former career; prior to becoming a filmmaker, Zombie was the frontman for the metal band White Zombie, and a successful solo artist from the late 1990s. His horror credentials were established, to some length, in his musical career. Both White Zombie and his solo work's songs and videos made references to genre films including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *To The Devil A Daughter* (Peter Sykes, 1976) and *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1981), allusions to horror tropes (skeletons, witches, gore, pumpkins, graveyards), sci-fi b-movies, and other cult films such as *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982). Videos for singles (directed by Zombie) evoke *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1920) and use clips from *Dr. Jekyll and*

Mr. Hyde (John S. Robertson, 1920), and his band took its name from a 1932 Bela Lugosi film.



Figure 5: Halloween: 'A Rob Zombie film'

Given that Zombie was so creatively engaged with horror iconography, progressing to make feature length genre films which drew inspiration from the 1970s 'golden age' (Wood 1979) of American horror cinema seems a natural progression. His first film, *House of 1000 Corpses*, had been made for Universal, but on completion the studio was reluctant to release it due to concerns about the film's violent content and thus its probable NC-17 rating, and it was shelved until 2003, when the director purchased the rights and entered a deal with Lions Gate (Squires 2013). *Corpses*' convoluted and chaotic plot focuses on four teens on a cross-country journey visiting carnivalesque roadside attractions, who fatally happen across the monstrous figures of Dr. Satan (Walter Phelan) and the Firefly family – crazed clown Captain Spaulding (Sid Haig), Otis (Bill Moseley) and Baby (Sheri Moon Zombie) among them. *The Devil's Rejects* acts as a sequel to *House of 1000 Corpses*, and follows Spaulding, Otis and Baby as they attempt to outrun vigilante Sheriff Wydell (William Forsythe), tracking the family on a torturous killing spree across Texas as he seeks revenge for the death of his brother at the hands of the Fireflies.

Critical response for *Corpses* was largely negative, bemoaning the film's incoherence and what was seen as its over-derivative nature and reliance on allusions to other horror texts (Russell 2003, Gleiberman 2003). The film was, however, reasonably well-received by horror audiences, no doubt helped in part by Zombie's familiarity. The anticipation created by its delayed release contributed to its status as a 'pre-fabricated cult film' (a particular type of text, constructed with both an awareness of its influences and its potential cult reception and designation; see Hunter 2000: 190). *The Devil's Rejects* fared better. A number of mainstream critics (Chang 2005, Ebert 2005) favourably reviewed the film on account of Zombie's effective employment of exploitation style and its homage to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Both *Corpses* and *Rejects* are brutally violent and gory, but the sequel especially engages with the aesthetic and tone of 1970s horror, from the rough, desaturated look of the film, through the script which is oddly, irreverently comic in places, to its portrayal of the dysfunctional, backwoods American family and inept, corrupt law enforcers (see chapter 6 for further discussion of these elements in horror of the seventies). Zombie has also acknowledged the influence of New Hollywood films of the same period, which though largely outside the horror genre, shared themes and a new filmmaking style. This is evident in *Rejects*' final scene, a showdown between the Fireflies and Wydell's troops which recalls *Bonnie and Clyde*'s (Arthur Penn, 1967), shootout; in the film's alignment with the road movie; and in Zombie's assertion that he takes ideas from not only horror cinema, but other kinds of film as well: 'I like stuff that's raw and edgy [...] I ask myself, "what would work for *Taxi Driver*?"' (in *Re-Imagining Halloween*).

Rob Zombie's brief filmmaking career lent a certain legitimacy to his work on *Halloween*. As Nathan Lee suggests, Zombie 'established his status as the most learned and faithful of grindhouse disciples – having, in effect, already done a remake, albeit of a non-existent film – Zombie is liberated to rethink *Halloween* from the inside out' (Lee 2008: 26). 'Rethinking' the material, for the most part, involves portraying Michael as human, but Zombie's film is laden with stylistic tropes from previous work, which suggests a genuinely individual and

auteurist approach to making the film 'his'. First and foremost, the violence is brutal and bloody, and frequently opts for visceral shocks over the heightened suspense seen in Carpenter's film (Nelson 2010: 107). In sequences where Michael repeatedly slashes at his sister with a kitchen knife, beats her boyfriend with an aluminium bat until his skull caves in, and thrashes his bully to death while he begs forgiveness, the child Myers is as vicious as the adult who returns to stalk Laurie's friends and kill her parents. These scenes are gory and unrelenting. This is especially true of the director's, rather than theatrical cut, which was no doubt aided by the growing US trend in 'unrated' DVD editions. Not having to conform to the requirements of MPAA approval for home video releases allows filmmakers the opportunity to include additional, enhanced, or unedited violent scenes. Like much contemporary horror, there is a focus in *Halloween* on victims' suffering and the bloody results, post-carnage. This is perhaps to be expected of a Rob Zombie film (and, indeed, of remakes aligned with torture porn trends) but it is atypical of the 'traditional' slasher. As Richard Nowell's (2011) study has shown, slasher films including the original *Halloween* were marketed to appeal to a wide audience, and thus largely avoided excessive violence or bloodletting (and indeed horror films with a high 'gore quota' are usually less successful at the box office; see Davis & Natale 2010). Yet Zombie's film emphasises and exaggerates these aspects, bringing it closer in association to his own previous films and to contemporary horror than to the earlier slasher cycle.

Despite boasting a higher budget which inevitably provides a sleeker look than the raw, unpolished *Rejects* or *Corpses*, *Halloween* shares many stylistic similarities with the films. Zombie employs a variety of footage styles to tell stories: news reports emphasise the severity of the criminals' acts in all three films, home videos are used in place of flashbacks to contrast horrific events with happier times. *Halloween* also uses CCTV footage at the asylum and Loomis' video recordings of his meetings with Michael as a shorthand for time passing, swiftly covering the deterioration of the boy's mental health as he grows older in a few short scenes. There are also deliberately stylistic choices

which draw attention to the film's camerawork and editing, such as the use of sepia tones, freeze frames, claustrophobic close-ups, and extended, slow motion scenes of chaos – two shoot-outs in *The Devil's Rejects*, and a scene in *Halloween* where young Michael, having just stabbed a nurse with a fork, is restrained. He struggles and screams while Deborah and Loomis look on, and the audio, a loud, repetitive whining alarm, is slowed down to match the pace of the sequence. Casting is also similar, with a number of actors returning from Zombie's earlier films: Sheri Moon Zombie, Sid Haig, William Forsythe and Bill Moseley, among others; and cameo appearances from noted cult, exploitation or horror stars including Dee Wallace, Ken Foree, Sybill Danning, Udo Kier, Brad Dourif and Danny Trejo. Thematically, there are noticeable comparisons with Zombie's other films too, with an emphasis on dysfunctional familial relationships, as well as references to real-life serial killers (a newsreader describes Myers' childhood killing spree as "Manson-like in its viciousness" while a similar allusion to Jack the Ripper features in *Rejects*).

Perhaps the most interesting way in which Zombie adapts Carpenter's film to make it a product of his own 'unique vision' can be observed in the film's temporal settings. The years in which the events of *Halloween* take place are not specified through title cards or in dialogue, but it is possible to establish roughly when the different acts are set. The first third of the film, dealing with Michael's childhood, appears to be set in the late 1970s (and leaked early drafts of the script place it in 1978, contemporaneous with the setting of most of Carpenter's film as well as its release; see 'K' 2009). Michael is a long haired rock fan who wears a KISS t-shirt and listens to 'God of Thunder' (1976), who Zombie has said reminds him of himself and his friends at Michael's age, a 'rock 'n' roll loner kid' (in Stephenson 2009). 1970s styling is also apparent in the fashion (most notably in Deborah's afghan coats and platform boots) and in Zombie's musical choices (songs by Nazareth and Blue Öyster Cult). Once Michael is incarcerated in Smith's Grove, we see the time passing through the evolving technology of the devices Loomis uses to record his interviews with Michael on (and in Loomis' aging). When Michael breaks out of the asylum,

although the time-setting is left ambiguous, the final act in which he returns to Haddonfield appears to be set in the present. Laurie and her friends dress in a modern style, and we see characters use cell phones. However, it is illogical to set events between 1978 and 2007, and this does not make sense in the context of the film's narrative structure. Michael returns to Haddonfield after just under 17 years (we know he is in Smith's Grove for at least 15 years, and know Laurie is 17), meaning that if Michael's childhood killing spree does take place in 1978, his return would be around 1995. I would argue that not explicitly locating the temporal setting of either series of events is a deliberate choice which allows Zombie to engage with elements of his regular 1970s exploitation aesthetic. By locating the first part of the film in the 1970s he can indulge in a favoured style and soundtrack choices, and make references to the look and feel of horror cinema of the time. Furthermore, by leaving the modern setting ambiguous, older tropes and allusions are effectively 'blended', allowing for explicit references to both Carpenter's film which do not appear 'outdated', as well as elements which recollect other influences; a scene evocative of 1970s rape-revenge where two guards rape a female inmate in Michael's cell, for example, or the final shot of Laurie, blood drenched and screaming hysterically, much like the closing image of Sally in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

By employing stylistic and thematic tropes that were common in his earlier work, Rob Zombie strived to make *Halloween* a genre-aware, individual exploitation film that is both aligned to Carpenter's film and the slasher cycle, but also associates itself with the 'golden age' of horror that came before it – the remake is a hybridised, stylish and interesting take on a character study that is recognisable as a 'Rob Zombie film'. Yet Zombie has subsequently stated that he had a 'miserable experience' remaking *Halloween* and its sequel (*Halloween II*, Rob Zombie, 2009) (in Dickson 2013), a hallucinatory film that errs towards the supernatural (Michael is haunted by his mother and himself as a child) while going further still to emphasise Michael's human nature (he spends much of the film without his mask), and stylistically pre-empted his last film, *The Lords of Salem* (2012). The director's experience was reportedly linked to difficulties

working on a more mainstream project with major producers (the Weinstein brothers at Dimension Films), suggesting a clash between Zombie's 'creative vision' and a studio's commercial imperatives (Abrams 2013). Critical reception to *Halloween* was average. The contrast between the auteurist early scenes of Myer's childhood and the director's approach to remaking the remainder of Carpenter's film meant many reviewers found the two halves of Zombie's film 'incompatible' (see Newman 2007, Douglas 2007, Zoller Seitz 2007). Zombie has subsequently distanced himself from remaking practices, having dropped out of directing a new version of *The Blob* to which he was attached (Dickson 2013), and has even symbolically killed his Myers off in his animated comedy *The Haunted World of El Superbeasto* (2009) (see Figure 6). Although notable in its originality and the artistic approach to its production, then, Rob Zombie's experience with *Halloween* (and the critical reception to the film) shows that a remade work can never be considered as an entirely separate entity to its original, particularly if that original is especially popular and held in high regard, and shows how artistic integrity often takes second place to commercial viability.



Figure 6: The death of Michael Myers in *The Haunted World of El Superbeasto*

Point-of-View in the 'Arty-Slasher': *Maniac*

While Carpenter's *Halloween* was famed for its extended single-take opening sequence shot entirely from the young Michael Myer's perspective, Rob

Zombie's remake barely utilises the technique. This is not uncommon in new versions. Many avoid POV, use it only sparingly, or, as in the case of *My Bloody Valentine*, subvert it to exploit a new technology. There is one recent remake, however, which is filmed almost entirely from the killer's perspective. *Maniac* (Franck Khalfoun, 2012) transforms the low-budget exploitation values of the original into a sleeker, almost arthouse aesthetic, emulating the look of European horror movements, notably *gialli* (the influence of which is also recognisable in the synth score) and the new French extremism (with which producer/writer Alexandre Aja, co-writer Grégory Levasseur and cinematographer Maxime Alexandre are connected, through *Haute Tension/High Tension/Switchblade Romance*, Alexandre Aja, 2003). Shot almost entirely from Frank's (Elijah Wood) perspective, the remake transforms the POV assumed prevalent in the slasher film from recurring/occasional trope to cinematographic and stylistic type. Seen through Frank's eyes, Los Angeles provides a setting that is bleak and grimy, and a perfect substitute for the downtown Manhattan of William Lustig's original film, which, now largely gentrified, is no longer such an appropriate location. The city skyline in the background contrasts with neon-lit back streets and parking lots with chain link fences, tents housing rough sleepers and shuttered storefronts, and the glossy opulence of cosmopolitan restaurants and galleries is quickly lost once characters step back outside. Frank's apartment, behind his mother's old mannequin store (in which he now lives alone, following her death), is decorated as it is in the 1980 version, in sickly greens and purples, and furnished eclectically with old items that not only imply his limited financial means, but also suggest that his desires for preservation extend beyond wanting to 'keep' his victims, which he does by dressing his mannequins in the dead women's clothes and stapling their scalps to the dummies' heads.

Like Lustig's film, the narrative juxtaposes Frank's psychotic behaviour toward women (triggered by his abusive childhood relationship with his neglectful, prostitute mother) with the potential romance blossoming between him and Anna (Nora Arnezeder) (played by Caroline Munro in 1980). Unlike the

original, however, this storyline is transformed into something wholly plausible, most simply through the casting and characterisation. Munro's Anna, despite identifying the times spent with Frank (Joe Spinell) as 'dates', seems interested in him only as a friend and through pity. Moreover, it is implied that her relationship with her friend Rita (Abigail Clayton) is perhaps not strictly platonic, and that when Frank attacks Rita, he therefore does so out of jealousy. That a woman of Anna's beauty and confidence might find someone like Frank sexually attractive is never presented as a plausible option.

In Khalfoun's remake, Frank is of slight build and boyishly attractive, the opposite of his 1980 counterpart played by Spinell. This is emphasised on his date with Lucie (Megan Duffy), a woman he has picked up online and will later strangle and scalp in her apartment, when she tells him that before seeing his photograph she had imagined him "like, fat...with long black hair, and greasy skin, full of acne", an appearance not unlike Spinell's Frank, and one which she ascribes to "looking like a psycho" – not only alluding to the original, but also addressing its problems. Wood's Frank is, as Lucie tells him, "cute", and although fairly quiet, somehow charming. His connection to Anna is made stronger than the original pairing through a particular mutual interest. She is an artist who photographs mannequins, Frank restores them, and their friendship develops as he works on a commission for her upcoming exhibition. Although their relationship never evolves into one which is romantic, it is a credible option for the first two acts of the film, as we witness coy flirtations and moments of connection from Frank's perspective. When Anna reveals that she has a boyfriend, Frank's shock is not only entirely understandable, but almost palpable. While the believability of Frank and Anna as a 'couple' in the remake no doubt play a large part in this, it is the connection between audience and narrator which invites our empathy towards Frank.

Such empathy is largely encouraged through *Maniac's* advanced use of POV. The film opens with a long shot of two women walking to hail a cab after a night out, but it is immediately evident that this is a direct perspective POV shot – it is clearly from inside a vehicle, and the friends' conversation is overheard

only distantly, the distinct sound of ‘our’ breathing much louder. One woman bids goodnight to her friend, who waits for a second taxi. Our alignment with Frank is confirmed the first time he speaks, in response to a passer-by making a move on his target; his angry, muttered ‘leave her alone’ is as clear and foregrounded as one would hear their own voice. This pre-credit sequence continues as ‘we’ follow the girl, scaring her when she notices and makes eye contact. “I see you too”, Frank mumbles before driving off. The film cuts to a shot from inside the woman’s apartment building, watching her climb out of a cab, recounting the event to her friend on the phone as she makes her way upstairs, Frank/us following her in the dark. At her doorway, she pauses, sensing something, and turns sharply when she hears Frank inhale. A knife is thrust upwards from the bottom of the shot and through the woman’s chin into her open mouth, silencing her scream and killing her instantly. Frank’s other hand enters the frame and grabs a fistful of her hair, removing the knife and then scalping her (see Figure 7). The entire time, Frank’s victim returns his gaze, and our perspective is clearly united with his as she looks directly (although lifelessly) at the camera throughout.



Figure 7: Maniac: Viewer aligned with killer through POV camerawork

Frank himself is seen mostly only in photographs or reflections (in mirrors, windows and, in a clear reference to the poster/cover art for Lustig’s film, in a car door following a murder – seen only from the waist down, legs slightly spread, the curve of the metal makes the svelte Wood appear much more like Spinell’s larger-framed Frank, holding a bloody knife in one hand and

his victim's scalp in the other). Clever camerawork ensures that our visual perspective is absolutely that of Frank's. Characters address the camera directly, it pans when he turns, and spins uncontrollably, disorienting our view momentarily, when he is hit by a car, or when Lucie pushes him down on to her bed. Other effects are adopted to emphasise the connection between viewer and narrator. Shots blur and pulsate when Frank gets one of the "terrible migraines" he suffers from, accompanied by a heightened, monotonous electronic score which can be understood as both an extra-diegetic, stylistic choice and an aural signifier of Frank's pain. We witness his hallucinations (Lucie bleeding from her scalp as they talk in the restaurant; other diners silently staring at him; his mannequins coming to life, and eventually them ripping him to pieces, eating his flesh in the film's final scene). We are also privy to flashbacks to his childhood, where he watches his mother having sex with anonymous men as she tells him "Frank, honey – go wait in the car" or, seeing him watching from the closet, mouths "shhh...mommy loves you".

This method of presenting Frank's story means that the audience is also witness to his crimes; we are with Frank as he selects, watches and subsequently stalks his victims, and we see the terror in the women's reactions as they address Frank directly. The death in the pre-credit sequence, and the murder of Lucie that follows are seen through Frank's eyes from the beginning of the sequence until their scalps are removed (in detail as gory as that created by Tom Savini's effects from the first film). However, in the remaining three murder sequences, the perspective changes. In the first two of these later scenes, we see Frank, rather than see as Frank. Firstly, Jessica (Genevieve Alexandra) is chased into an empty car park, where he traps her and disables her by slashing her Achilles tendon. Frank follows her as she crawls away, pausing for a moment to look up at the sky and inhale deeply, as if preparing, before beginning to stab her. After the first few blows, the camera pulls back, severing the viewer's alignment with Frank, and pans round so that the shot is from the front, and we see him crouched over his victim, continuing to strike her with his knife. There is a slow zoom, closing in on Frank's arms and face as he

kills her, pauses to look around, and, off-screen, scalps her. The second sequence in which we become 'detached' from Frank is as he kills Anna's agent, Rita (Jan Broberg). Starting from Frank's perspective as he sits atop her (Rita is bound and gagged, face down on her bed), trailing his knife over her back, the camera again pulls back and freezes on him laying over her, crying and calling her "mommy". Again, the perspective moves so Frank and Rita are seen from the front, as he scalps her alive.

These moments of violence, in which the viewer is seemingly no longer positioned in Frank's place, complicate the function of such an approach to the film's perspective. The use of POV in slasher films has been the subject of much critical and academic writing on the subgenre, and, as Peter Hutchings notes, its significance is often unclear (Hutchings 2004: 195). The initial cycle was often criticised – particularly after 1980, when slashers were assumed to become increasingly violent – for encouraging identification with the killer, and potentially provoking pleasure through a sadistic appreciation of their actions, notably when they were carried out against women. But this assumption on the part of the audience is problematic, not only because it reduces any pleasure they might gain from watching slasher films to that of sadism, but also because such polemic suppositions ignore other potential reasons for a film's adoption of POV. The audience may, for example, 'identify' masochistically with a victim or, from a structural perspective, the POV may simply create suspense or conceal the killer's identity in the 'whodunit' narratives of so many slashers (see Hutchings 2004: 196-198 for a more detailed discussion). In most instances, the purpose of using point of view in slasher films is open to interpretation.

In the case of *Maniac*, however, it is apparent that the use of POV is indeed to align both an audience's perspective and empathy with Frank. This is not only suggested in the film itself (through both its continual use, as well as its utilisation in connection with other devices such as sound and visual techniques), but has been confirmed by the director. Franck Khalfoun has stated in interviews that he 'wanted the audience to share the experience of being trapped in a body that forces you to do horrible things with no escaping

fate' (in O'Neill 2012: 12), and observes 'moviemaking is about feeling empathy for your character. And if you don't see the character [then] that's a real challenge. I was able to trap an audience into this man's existence – the inability to stop himself, which is his disease' (in Earnshaw 2013). Those moments in which Frank's murders are not seen from his perspective, rather than disassociating the audience from him (or, perhaps, deliberately severing the association to avoid first-person observation of such brutal acts, thus avoiding potential issues with critics and censors), are intended to further solidify their empathy. It should be understood, according to Khalfoun, not as us watching Frank, but as *us as Frank watching himself*, as part of an out of body experience which 'serial killers have talked about' (Khalfoun, in Foutch 2013). While it is, therefore, inarguable that the intention of using POV in *Maniac* is for audience association with the killer, then, it seems unlikely that this results in sadistic pleasure, at least for the average viewer. Frank is disturbed, the audience is aware of this not only from his behaviour but by being privy to his delusions and 'experiencing' his suffering (as well as witnessing that of his victims). His physical pain is emphasised through sound and visual techniques, we witness his sadness as the child of an abusive mother through flashbacks, and his frustrations that his murderous actions never provide what he 'needs'.

Frank does not necessarily kill because of sadistic or sado-sexual motivation. Indeed, it is implied that Frank is, if not entirely asexual, then at least disinterested in sexual activity or even potentially impotent. This is suggested in the scene with Lucie, where despite fondling her breasts, he resists sex and is largely passive until he begins to strangle her, and is further inferred when he hallucinates his lower body having been replaced with that of a mannequin, a smooth resin mound present in place of his genitals. The sequence which features Rita's death provides a similar narrative purpose to the original film. It is Frank's final murder before killing Anna (who is killed in the remake but escapes from Frank in Lustig's version), and both are clearly presented as taking place in the midst of a delusional tirade against his mother ("Your hair is different, and you look different, but you can't fool me...I know it's you").

However, the sexual connotations of the 1980 scene, in which Frank heavily breathes and lustfully eyes Rita's bound body, before stabbing her, and rocking back and forth atop her while whispering "Mommy...mommy" as she bleeds to death, are absent from the remake's equivalent scene. Rather than being presented as 'innocent', a young rival for Anna's affections, the Rita of Khalfoun's film is more clearly identified as a substitute for Frank's abusive mother. She is both a much older woman (positioning her as of maternal age to Wood's Frank) and is incredibly rude when meeting him at Anna's exhibition, offering to put him in touch with another artist who destroys "useless items", mocking Frank and his lovingly restored mannequins. Rita is not punished for her implied sexuality, or for preventing him from connecting with Anna, as she clearly is in Lustig's film; Rita is here a clear stand-in for Frank's mother. Although she is naked in this attack, Frank does not stab her, he does not appear sexually interested in Rita or move suggestively on her body, and when we see him cry and call her "mommy", it seems more from sadness and desperation than potential psycho-sexual confusion. The violence in *Maniac* is largely desexualised. Even Anna's death retains a purity which suggests Frank's romantic attachment outweighs any sexual desire. In fact, it is never shown. The scene cuts from Frank holding a knife at her scalp, to him presenting a wedding-gowned mannequin with a diamond ring, his bloody hands placing it on the dummy's finger, before the camera pans up to show Anna's necklace and bloody hair.

While the use of POV shots both align audience identification with Frank and contribute to a stylistic aesthetic, presenting events from his perspective in the *Maniac* remake also allows moments of association with horror films outside of the slasher cycles. This is evident in two scenes in particular. Late in the film, Frank and Anna are at the cinema, watching *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. Momentarily distracted, Frank turns to watch Anna, who eventually notices and jokingly scolds "stop staring! You're missing the movie". The camera pans back to the theatre screen, returning to the image of Cesare (Conrad Veidt) struggling with Jane (Lil Dagover). As the scene plays out, Frank begins to

imagine his mother's voice calling out to him. Panicking, he notices other patrons in the auditorium can also 'hear' her. When he looks back at the screen, instead of Cesare and Jane, Frank now sees himself strangling Lucie (see Figure 8). Rather than occurring in flashback from Frank's perspective, he sees himself here, as he is prone to do in an out-of-body experience, and the image adopts the expressionist aesthetic of *Caligari*. Frank and Lucie are characters within the film in this hallucination, and Frank has associated himself (and thus his aligned audience) with the monster of this acclaimed horror classic.



Figure 8: Comparisons with *Caligari* in *Maniac*

A perhaps less direct, but ultimately no less striking, reference to an earlier horror film can be found in the early sequence where Frank kills Lucie. Returning to her apartment after their date, Lucie puts on some music. Her choice is 'Goodbye Horses' by Q Lazzarus, a 1988 synth pop/new wave track recognisable from *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) as the soundtrack to psychopath Buffalo Bill's (Ted Levine) dance for his own camera. The scene is infamous at a level outside of horror fandom, as evidenced by numerous parodies (in, for example *Family Guy* [Fox, 1999-present] and *Clerks II* [Kevin Smith, 2006]) and is no doubt intended to be familiar to viewers of *Maniac*. Lucie even draws attention to it, exclaiming "I LOVE this song!" The parallels between the scenes do not end at 'Goodbye Horses'; although not immediately obvious, there are other similarities. While the song plays, Lucie dances. Frank removes her bra on her instruction and she continues to perform, coyly hiding before coming back to him (and thus in close up) and asking rhetorically "are you gonna fuck me, Frank?" Taken in its entirety, this sequence is somewhat reminiscent of Bill's performance (see Figure 9). Bill applies lipstick

in close-up at the start of the scene, directly into the camera (as if a mirror); he asks no-one: “would you fuck me?” The naked Bill then dances for the camera, looking directly at it throughout – just as we are positioned, viewer/Frank, watching Lucie. He wears a woman’s scalp with a mop of strawberry blond curls not dissimilar from those of ‘RedLucie86’ (the screen name she uses to meet Frank’s ‘I M Timid’ online) which Frank will soon remove, and Bill’s only ‘audience’ is a group of mannequins in women’s clothing.



Figure 9: Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs*, Lucie in *Maniac*

It is not my intention to suggest an explicit connection between Lucie and Bill, necessarily, but rather to argue that there are numerous visual and aural signifiers which *Maniac* adopts in this scene to evoke *The Silence of the Lambs*, and that this association goes some way to link the remake with a ‘quality’ production, an ‘arty-slasher’, as Yvonne Tasker terms it (in Abbott, 2010: 29). Mark Jancovich has described how the highly successful, multiple Oscar-winning *The Silence of the Lambs* was marketed to audiences outside of horror fandom as ‘offer[ing] the thrills of a horror movie without middle-class audiences either having to feel guilty or questioning their sense of their own distinction from that monstrous other, the troubling and disturbing figure of the slasher movie viewer’ (Jancovich 2001: 40). In a similar vein, and when considered alongside *Maniac*’s arthouse pretensions, we might understand its references to films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *The Silence of the Lambs* as an attempt to distance the remake from the wealth of other slashers, even as it promotes a trope as recognisable to the cycle as POV.

Maniac's reception was varied, and in many instances reviews only underlined the issue of ascribing a particular purpose to the use of POV. Critics writing for the mainstream press – like many initial critics of the first slasher cycle – found the presentation of events from Frank's perspective problematic, some suggested the camerawork placed the viewer in a voyeuristic position of sadistic enjoyment, others interpreted the film as misogynistic, and aligned its explicit violence with torture porn tropes (see Tookey 2013, Abele 2013, Rapold 2013, Lewis 2013). Reviewers for trade press and film magazines were more forgiving, noting the challenging nature and unsettling effect of the first person perspective, but observing that this did not detract from sympathy for both Frank and his victims; instead these reviews praised the artistic cinematography and clever camerawork, as well as Wood and Arnezeder's performances (see Nelson 2012, Smith 2013, Bitel 2013). Horror fan websites such as *Fangoria* and *Bloody Disgusting*, meanwhile, celebrated the film for both retaining the 'spirit' of Lustig's cult original while offering a new take, suggested it was superior to most horror remakes, and welcomed the film's addition to the genre on its own merits. One reviewer labelled it a 'modern horror classic' ('MrDisgusting' 2013), while another claimed 'this isn't only one of the best horror remakes ever produced (taking easy position next to the likes of *The Fly*, *The Thing*, and *The Blob*) but a masterpiece of technical wizardry and a deserving horror classic in its own right' ('Pestilence' 2012, see also Gingold 2013, Murphy 2013).

The use of POV in *Maniac* is complex. It is a technique which is utilised, first and foremost, as a stylistic choice, which aims to ascribe a particular 'arty' aesthetic to the film, thus marking it apart from the 'generic' slasher. Simultaneously, it subconsciously plays with (supposedly) one of the most recognisable slasher tropes; its continual presence clearly associates it with the cycle. Secondly, it aligns the viewer with Frank and encourages empathy, while ensuring such empathies cannot be entirely understood as a sadistic connection. Finally, its use emphasises references to particular types of 'prestige' horror, and elevates them from mere pastiche to possible sub-generic

association, moving the film away from association with a malignant cycle and identifying it as an artistic, individual and distinct horror film.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the problems that arise in attempting to define the slasher film, and in continuing its use as a descriptive label for an increasingly diverse group of films. Studies of the original cycle vary in their descriptions, taxonomies, and in the examples they include as part of the sub-genre, and often differ from fan and audience opinion. The slasher remake, meanwhile, is often only recognisable as a 'slasher' by its connection with the original film. While the previous chapter discussed a mode of remaking which strived for association with an original film so closely that it acted as a point of promotion, many of the films considered here work by asserting their differences to or even disassociating from the original slasher cycle (which is itself not as distinctively defined as initially thought). The variations between these films not only support the need for a continued move towards understanding individual films' nuances and originalities, but also provide further evidence that categorising horror remakes is problematic, not only in terms of making distinctions between particular types, sub-genres or cycles of horror films, but also in providing taxonomies of adaptation. At what point does a film like Rob Zombie's *Halloween* become less a remake of John Carpenter's seminal slasher and more of an auterist, exploitation homage? Can an audience not appreciate Franck Khalfoun's *Maniac* as a stylistic serial killer movie with smart camerawork without an awareness of its origins as a low-budget cult film?

The continual privileging of original films over new versions mean that remakes are frequently dismissed, lamented as unoriginal, pointless, uninspired 'rip-offs'. But, as this chapter has shown, they are often highly distinctive – not only from their sources, but from each other as well – and in many cases provide a point of development for the genre, inspiring new films and encouraging continued production and innovation. This is evident in the commercial success of a film like *My Bloody Valentine*, which initiated the

popularisation of 3D technologies in genre films, or in the marketable hybridity of teen drama, slasher and thriller in *Prom Night* or *When A Stranger Calls*. The artistic homage to 1970s horror/exploitation, critically-acclaimed serial killer films and classic horror cinema in *Halloween* and *Maniac* is exemplary of the genre's tendency toward fusing styles, types and tropes. Although not especially well-received, *Halloween* helped to shape Rob Zombie's growing status as a new horror auteur, and *Maniac* is welcomed for its originality. Many slasher film remakes function as particularly key examples of the potential for remaking. They are, like the supposedly postmodern slashers of the mid-1990s, highly intertextual, hybridised texts which take inspiration not only from their sources, but other key films, pop culture, artistic influences, and contemporary genre fare, and combine them to produce new and original horror films. Rather than lament slasher remakes' supposedly derivative and indistinct nature, it is instead more fruitful to observe their nuances, distinctions and dissimilarities, and move toward an understanding of how such variations contribute toward an ever-evolving horror cinema.

Chapter 6: Socio-political Allegory in 1970s Horror Films and their Post-9/11 Remakes

Horror cinema is often associated with allegorical reflection. From the Cold War concerns of 1950s science fiction (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Robert Wise 1951) to the fear surrounding the escalating AIDS epidemic in body horror of the 1980s (*The Thing*, *The Fly*), genre films are frequently contextualised as figurative representations of contemporaneous social, political and cultural concerns. One particular period has, above all others, consistently attracted retrospective critical acclaim and academic attention. Much American horror cinema of the 1970s has been consistently positioned as the genre's 'golden age' (Wood 1979), and considered as a recognisable cycle of films which richly engage with the attitudes and values of the highly politicised era in which they were made. Films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Dawn of the Dead* seemingly reflect the concerns of 1970s American society, addressing issues such as the response to the Vietnam War, the rise of consumerism in an increasingly capitalist America, and the collapse of the nuclear family as American institution (see Wood 1979 & 1986, Sharrett 1984, Derry 1987, Waller 1987, Crane 1994, Jancovich 1994, Wells 2000, Humphries 2002, Blake 2002, Bould 2003, Phillips 2012, among others).

Remakes of these films, by contrast, are rarely credited with any purpose in terms of social commentary. Their reception is often framed by criticism. First, they are accused of being concerned primarily with aesthetics and 'style over substance', resulting in 'covering old ground with inconvenient social comment stripped away' (Newman 2004a). Second, the commercial imperatives of their production are seen as a 'tried and tested' formula for maximising profit. The remakes are very rarely considered within their own contexts, and the focus instead is on their derivation from, and hierarchical relationship with, their source texts. However, a small number of studies (Blake 2008, Briefel 2011, Roche 2011, Wetmore 2012) have aligned some of the films with cycles of

'apocalyptic horror' produced since 2001 which address the concerns of post-9/11 American society, and suggest the remakes can be understood as metaphorical manifestations of socio-political concerns equivalent to their 1970s counterparts. This chapter both explores and problematises this notion. I will illustrate how, although such references can indeed be observed within some of the films, they are limited, confused and rather ambiguous. Considering the new versions solely in this way both ignores the processes of adaptation at play in remaking, and at the same time refuses to consider how films function within the genre at the time of their own making. It ascribes a necessity and 'worthiness' to the work, and forces them to fit within a convenient contextual framework which corresponds to that of the original films.

Beginning by both outlining how the 1970s cycle has become widely understood in this way and suggesting that such interpretations might themselves be over-emphasised, the chapter moves on to challenge those equivalent studies of socio-political metaphor in remakes. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, and new versions of the films of George A. Romero (*Dawn of the Dead* and *The Crazies*), whose work has repeatedly drawn attention for its apparent depictions of the values and concerns of American society in the 1970s, are then used as case studies. Closely analysing the remakes and their potential metaphorical reflections on post-9/11 opinion and attitudes outlines just how ambiguous such 'messages' can be, and considering the films within the context of their reception suggests that scholarly efforts to ascribe such meanings are both somewhat overstretched and place an emphasis on interpretation that these remakes do not necessarily warrant or require.

Horror, Politics and Society in 1970s America

Academic and critical discussions of 1960s and 1970s horror have repeatedly contextualised genre texts within the fraught socio-political climate of the time in which they were produced. Retrospectively, films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Dawn of the Dead* have frequently

been interpreted as allegorical vehicles for young, disillusioned and politically-motivated filmmakers to critique the Vietnam War and the prevalence of consumerism (among other concerns). Yet such understanding ascribes a specific intention on the part of directors such as Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven and George A. Romero, and perhaps over-emphasises the metaphorical function of their films. This section argues that, while the tone and themes of horror did indeed shift in the 1970s, this was reflective of changes in American cinema and society more broadly, and that any 'message' found in the films is largely ambiguous; they are products of their time rather than explicit comments on it.

The emergence of darker, more explicit and politically engaged horror cinema in the 1970s can be largely attributed to general trends and the associated shifting attitudes of a new generation of young film makers. The late 1960s marked a turning point in American cinema as it began to reflect changes in both the film industry and attitudes in contemporary society. Ever-declining audience figures, the abolishment of the Hays code and its replacement with the MPAA rating system in 1968, and shifts within the industry (of both procedure and personnel), coupled with the influence of more readily-available foreign art films all affected American film. The emergence of 'New Hollywood' cinema saw the rise in release of lower budget films, made by younger, cine-literate directors for an audience dominated by men in their late teens and early twenties, a generation of 'Baby Boomers' born in the wake of World War II (see Kramer 2006: 60, 74-75; Maltby 2003: 22). Ushering in a new era for the industry, films like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969) and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) revised classical Hollywood genres, challenging the myths on which they were founded and explicitly critiquing American society and politics in the process. Accordingly dark and more cynical in tone than the earlier output of Classical Hollywood, these films mixed serious themes and (often) an auteurist approach to their making with the kind of content previously associated with exploitation, including explicit sex and violence (see Kramer 2006). As the Hollywood Renaissance thrived for a

decade from 1967, the concerns and styles of a new filmmaking generation were evident in horror as much as in other genres, and for the first time, films which would have previously been considered the domain of exploitation cinema began to make waves at the box office – *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and *Carrie* included.

The early 1960s had been a time of optimism in American society. A real possibility for change had arisen with the election of John F. Kennedy in 1961, growing support for the civil rights movement, and the rise of the politically minded countercultural youth – a result of the Baby Boom coupled with the expansion of education and growing suburban affluence (Maltby 2003: 162-163). However, this positivity was short lived. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, violent race riots and the murder of civil rights protestors in Mississippi, and the rapid escalation of American involvement in Vietnam instigated by Kennedy's successor Lyndon B. Johnson ensured that the public's confidence in its government began to wane. By 1968 the Johnson administration was spending in excess of \$27 billion per year on the war effort, and over 500,000 US troops had been sent to Vietnam, many as a result of the rising draft calls (Quart & Auster 2002: p71). A society once inspired by the idealist rhetoric of the Kennedy administration now witnessed undeniable atrocities carried out by Americans in Vietnam (such as the My Lai massacre) as part of the first 'televised' war.

1968 also saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and the election of Richard Nixon, marking it out as 'merely the most apocalyptic year of a most momentous decade [...] for many Americans, their image of themselves, their society, and their place in the world underwent a painful transformation' (Quart & Auster 2002: 67). The revelation of the Watergate scandal in 1972 further undermined public confidence in the government. Coupled with a recession that marked an end to post World War II economic success (highlighted by a fuel crisis and a rise in debt), this ensured that by 1973, public consciousness had shifted, and 'for the first time in American history, public opinion polls reported that the American people were

no longer optimistic about the nation's future' (Quart & Auster 2002: 100). In a reflection of these attitudes, the tone of much New Hollywood cinema (and the horror films associated with this period) was one of disillusionment, malady and mistrust; accordingly, subsequent film criticism also shifted towards overtly political readings, and critical and academic interest in the horror genre (and its social and psychological significance) grew from the late 1970s.

While key horror films of this era rarely commented directly on such socio-political issues, many examples have since become widely understood as allegorical reflections on the general condition of the society in which they were produced. In the 1960s, the genre had engaged on some level with the idea that horror and the monstrous 'Other' could be found close to home; Robin Wood credited *Psycho* as the first Hollywood film which 'implicitly recognised Horror as both American and familial' (Wood, 1979, p19). Accordingly, however, it was a 1968 release which marked the beginning of horror's apparent tendency to not only reflect, but also critique, contemporary American societal concerns including racial conflict, Vietnam and the disintegration of the American family unit. George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* had transgressive qualities – gory and violent horror, a denial of narrative resolution and horror's first African-American hero in Ben (Duane Jones) – which marked it as one of the first horror films exemplary of the New Hollywood aesthetic. But it also featured dysfunctional or 'non-traditional' families which challenged the conventional patriarchal unit (adult siblings Johnny [Russell Streiner] and Barbra [Judith O'Dea] visit their father's grave, Johnny fails to save his sister during a zombie attack, and Barbra escapes while he is killed; young Karen Cooper [Kyra Schon] is zombified and found feeding on her father's corpse by her mother, whom she subsequently murders with a garden trowel). The film's final scenes, where Ben is unexpectedly shot by a zombie-killing mob, his body hooked, dragged, and thrown onto a burning pile of corpses, have been understood to evoke both recognisable scenes of Southern lynchings and the violence of Vietnam (see Wood 1986, Waller 1987, Jancovich 1994, Wells, 2000 and others for further discussion).

Robin Wood's 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' (1979) set a precedent for much of the subsequent academic work on American horror in the 1960s and 1970s. Even though his work has been criticised (largely as part of a wider shift from 1970s' Screen Theory), for example, due to its 'one dimensional definitions and all-embracing theories, especially those associated with psychology and psychoanalysis' (Neale, 2000, p98), it remains influential in its approach to identifying a number of the key concerns and themes of the genre at this time. Central to this is the idea of the films' monstrous 'Others' being distinctly human, not supernatural, or alien, as was previously conventional for much of the genre, but instead recognisable (on some level at least) as 'one of us'.²⁰ In keeping with the self-reflexive, cynical and self-critical nature of American cinema at the time, horror's monsters were now the product of 'normality', and in turn 'it [was] no longer possible to view normality itself as anything other than monstrous' (Wood, 1986: 85).

Perhaps the most common way in which horror cinema was seen to critique 'normal' (i.e. traditional) American values was through its representation of the nuclear family in decline and disarray. By the turn of the 1970s, the post-WWII baby boom had long since abated and birth rates continued to decline, coinciding with a rise in divorce rates following changes in legislation and the introduction of a 'no-fault' divorce bill. While the nuclear family remained a 'norm' throughout the conservative majority in the American Heartland, single life, separation and fewer (or no) children became viable 'lifestyle options' (see Cook 2002: 294). Familial dysfunction is evident through the 1960s – in *Psycho* and *Night of the Living Dead* for example – but its embodiment in the early 1970s films, namely *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is far more caustic. The failings of the family unit are apparent in *The Hills Have Eyes*, which pits the 'normal', and entirely unlikeable, Carter family against a clan of cannibalistic mountain dwellers who are clearly reflective of the Carters' familial structure. In a development of themes explored in Craven's earlier film, 1972's *The Last House on the Left* (see chapter 7 for a detailed discussion), the

²⁰ In addition to Robin Wood, Andrew Tudor's *Monsters and Mad Scientists* (1989) explores the personal and familial elements of the genre at this time in depth.

Carters' reactionary, cruel and extreme violence against the group who live by stealing and feeding off of passing families renders the film morally ambiguous, leaving questions not only around viewer sympathy, but also the effectiveness of retributive violence, unanswered (see Schneider 2002, Rodowick 1984, Derry 1987, Phillips 2012). Meanwhile, the deranged family of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is a parodic portrayal of the dysfunctional family unit (as discussed in chapter 4); the transvestism, comedic violence against each other and one-liners ("look what your brother did to the door!") contribute to a representation which would almost be sitcom-esque if it was not so horrific, and reflect on the inter-generational conflict of the time.

Both Mark Jancovich (1994) and Andrew Tudor (1989) argue that the emphasis on family dysfunction in these films should be understood as a critique of one institution among many in which the American people lost faith at the time. Indeed, criticisms of governmental bodies in addition to the nuclear family are apparent in other examples during the decade. The ineptitude of the authorities is evident early in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, when the police, sent to remove inner-city project residents who have ignored government orders to evacuate following a zombie 'epidemic', are shown either fleeing the scene, committing suicide or embarking on deranged shooting sprees. Romero's *The Crazies* exemplifies both martial and government incompetence and unflinching military brutality, the presence of the army in a small town dealing with the chaotic outbreak of a biological virus only exacerbating the situation. In *Dawn*, the media provide false information about 'safehouses' which results in death and further infection, while in *Chain Saw* the radio news reports the protagonists listen to on their road trip give increasingly depressing accounts of grave robbing, stabbings, mutilations and child murder.

Less direct, but still evident, both *Chain Saw* and *Hills* can be seen to feature criticism of governmental social and economic policies, where families are removed from commerce either through technological development (the closure of the outdated slaughterhouse where generations of Sawyers worked) or logistics (the clan of *Hills* live far removed from any developed community).

This forces the groups into both poverty and ultimately cannibalism, literally feeding off outsiders in order to survive (Humphries 2002: 119). Cannibalistic themes have more notably, and frequently, been linked to consumer capitalism, with *Dawn of the Dead* especially (and Romero's zombies more generally) interpreted as a satirical attack on mindless consumerism and self-serving greed (see Wood 1986, Humphries 2002, Blake 2002, Phillips 2012 among others).

Even discounting the specific themes and concerns of films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Dawn of the Dead*, the nihilism and disillusionment prevalent at the heart of horror in the 1970s can be seen to exemplify not only the tone of much American cinema of the time, but also the condition of its contemporary society. For example, *Chain Saw's* teenage victims are representational of the countercultural youth, and their murders suggest a complete disregard for (or disgust at) their optimistic 'hippie' values; the film can be seen as the movement's 'end-of-the-road movie', and rather than celebrating marginal culture, it 'reveals only the ugliness and savage heart of the American Dream' (Bould 2003: 103). The lack of satisfactory narrative resolution to any of these films only adds to their pessimism and ultimately apocalyptic tone. Normality is not restored, good does not routinely triumph over evil, and problems are not resolved (see Sharrett 1984, Derry 1987, Jancovich 1994, Bould 2003). Although all of the films conclude with some form of defeat or escape, they are far removed from the utopian 'happy endings' of the classical Hollywood era. Fran (Gaylen Ross) and Peter (Ken Foree) (*Dawn of the Dead*) flee their hideout mall in a helicopter with minimal fuel and the undead still walking the earth below them. Doug (Martin Speer), Bobby (Robert Houston) and Brenda (Susan Lanier) (*The Hills Have Eyes*) defeat their monstrous counterparts but have become just as (if not more so) violent than their enemy, and Sally flees from *Massacre's* Leatherface in the back of a passing truck, bloody, hysterical and traumatised, while the anthropophagous family, it is assumed (and effectively confirmed in the sequel), go back to 'business'.

Filmmakers themselves have also made attempts to explain the subtext within their work. George A. Romero has always been outspoken regarding the political inferences in his films – beginning with *Night of the Living Dead*, which he claims ‘came out of the anger of the times. No-one was gleeful at the way the world was going, so these political themes were addressed in the film. The zombies could be the dead in Vietnam; the consequence of our mistakes in the past, you name it’ (in Wells 2000: p80). Furthermore, and supporting the common reading of his films, Romero asserts that his zombies ‘are us...a new society devouring the old and just changing everything’ and that his satirical attack on consumerism in *Dawn of the Dead* was a comment on the process of social mobility in the seventies, where ‘having all this stuff winds up meaning nothing’ (in *The American Nightmare*). It was not solely Romero as writer/director of *Dawn of the Dead* who was influenced by ‘the anger of the times’. Tom Savini, who provided the film’s special effects, had served as a military photographer in Vietnam, and the bloody results of the zombie’s violent attacks were directly inspired by his photographs. As he states, ‘if it was going to be horrible, it’ll be horrible the way I saw it’ (in *The American Nightmare*).

Wes Craven has argued that ‘there is nothing in any one of my films that’s extraordinary. The twentieth century was the most violent century in the history of the planet – that’s why there is continual art about it’ (in Athorne 2003). He claims that he tried to make the violence in *The Last House on the Left* ‘real’ in an attempt to affect audiences desensitised to the violence in Vietnam which had become ‘television junk’ (in Wells 2000: 87-89), by directly imitating footage of methodical, execution style killings of the Vietnamese by American soldiers in the scene in which Mari (Sandra Cassell) is shot by her tormentors. Craven has discussed how witnessing the televised atrocities in Vietnam was his ‘coming of age to realise that Americans are not always the good guys, that things we do could be horrendous and evil...there was nothing to be trusted in the establishment and everything to be trusted in yourself and your generation’, and argued: ‘there’s something about the Disney-esque American Dream as an expectation, to which the flip side is realising that’s not

accurate, that gives US horror an additional rage' (in *The American Nightmare*). Craven's comments could easily be applied to *The Hills Have Eyes*; for example, the possibility that atrocities in Vietnam influenced the horrific scene where the mutants attack the Carter family in their trailer, rape Brenda, kill Lynne (Dee Wallace) and Ethel (Virginia Vincent), and snatch baby Katy.

Unlike Romero and Craven, Tobe Hooper has been less explicit and far more ambiguous about any potential political metaphor in, or inspiration for, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. He acknowledges in *The American Nightmare* that horror is his way of working through personal fears, particularly relating to 'family get-togethers', and claimed in an interview that accompanies the film on DVD that 'lots of political things happening in the US helped to fix the film - I was trying to say "this is America"'. However, it is more common for him to reference Ed Gein's murders or a trip to a local hardware store as inspiration. In a commentary with co-writer Kim Henkel, the pair joke about the perceived meanings of the film, laughing 'for me, this film is *really not* about the breakdown of the American nuclear family [...] that family sticks together, the family that slays together.' His claim 'I was trying to say "this is America"' contradicts his assertion in *The American Nightmare* that 'I think we shoot a lot of stuff, and twenty years later we find out what it meant'. This suggests that Hooper – unlike Romero and Craven declare – did not intentionally set out to produce a film with specific references to the concerns of seventies American society, even if retrospective readings have interpreted such commentary. His possible lack of intention in this regard is underlined by his later films; Romero and Craven both continued to produce horror that could arguably be seen to comment on the concerns of its time (Romero especially, whose work continues to play on his reputation as a social commentator), while Hooper went on to direct films which, with the possible exception of mainstream shocker *Poltergeist* (1982), have received little critical attention.

Regardless of Hooper's unclear intentions and incongruous claims, it is apparent that the original versions of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *Dawn of the Dead*, among other films, can be (and have been)

understood as metaphorically representing the socio-political and cultural concerns of a troubled decade in American history. Repeated allusions to escalating violence and increased military action in Vietnam, critiques of the declining nuclear family unit and other societal institutions, attacks on consumerism, and an overwhelming and foreboding sense of nihilism are all prevalent in horror cinema in the decade following 1968 – a year which marked a turbulent shift in American society, politics, and public opinion. It is important, however, to reiterate that such reflections were prevalent across a number of films and genres throughout this period; symbolism, political comment and allegory could be found in the generic revisionism of New Hollywood, and were not restricted to examples of the horror genre.

Furthermore, such interpretations of 1970s horror cinema's socio-political commentary are largely retrospective. Subsequent scholarly and critical analysis has been formed (directly or unwittingly) within a contextual understanding of the discourses initially sparked by Wood's work. While both negative (Maslin 1978) and positive (Ebert 1979) reviews of *Dawn of the Dead* observed the (intentional and explicit) consumerism critique in Romero's film, then, it is interesting that initial responses to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* failed to pick up on (inadvertent) subtext which has since been 'found'. Although *Chain Saw* gathered a cult following on the midnight movie circuit following its release, and its artistic merit was recognised with both inclusions into the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection and screenings at Cannes and London Film Festival in 1975, early reviews were mixed. Some praised its cinematography, technical execution and performances while otherwise dismissing it as crude, violent exploitation (*Variety* 1973, Ebert 1974), others were scathing and expressed disgust (Linda Gross, Stephen Koch [in Staiger 2008]), and some were positive (Rex Reed [in Staiger 2008]), but aside from the occasional connection to *Psycho* (both films loosely inspired by the serial killer Ed Gein), themes of familial dysfunction remained unobserved (see Staiger 2008 for a detailed discussion of *Chain Saw's* critical response).

While we might now, in the wake of critical acclaim, scholarly analysis and canonisation, take for granted those supposedly apparent meanings and messages of the 'golden age' of American horror, it is important to understand such factors as having been predominantly applied retrospectively. The nihilistic genre films of the 1970s were undoubtedly influenced by the time of their making, and filmmakers were inspired – consciously or otherwise – by their own social and political concerns and motivations. Yet even the directors' claims over any deliberate subtext in their film should be approached with a level of scepticism. As Matt Becker (2006) has observed, Romero and Carpenter, in addition to Hooper, have expressed ambivalence and ambiguity around political agenda, contradicted prior claims about their intentions, and had commercial motivations for the producing low-budget horror which were in harmony with neither the objective of their early, experimental work nor the critical analysis which *Chain Saw*, *Dawn* and *Hills* later received. The following section considers similar ambiguities (and the questions they raise) in remakes of films from this period and their scholarly analyses, which have discussed new versions as commenting on contemporary equivalent concerns in the wake of 9/11 and the 'War on Terror'.

Horror Remakes Post-9/11

The majority of academic and critical discourses surrounding horror remakes takes the stance that new versions are produced with few aims beyond making a profit. For many, they are perceived as tiresome exercises in reproducing and rebranding cherished films in order to make money at the box office, while seemingly challenging the 'message' of the originals. The relatively prolific production of remakes in the wake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* did not go unnoticed by many critics, who viewed the new versions as simple 'reimaginings', which updated the originals stylistically -- with new effects, explicit gore and bigger budgets – but with any socio-political comment or reference neatly removed:

These remakes flaunt their supposed slickness and modernity, hiding their absence of originality beneath pretty veneers and rapid editing... invoking the reputation of the original film, but also lacking the progressive subtext that made the original so notable and enduring (Church, 2006). (See also Macauley 2003, Bacal 2004, Simon 2006, Kermode 2003 and many more for examples).

Academic studies have largely aligned themselves with this popular critical opinion, mostly ignoring any potential allusions to contemporary societal concerns, and instead focusing on what they see as derisive changes between versions or using the remakes to lament the loss of creativity and originality within the genre (see Hantke 2010, Conrich 2010).

While this response is dismissive in its refusal to acknowledge remakes as 'worthy' of consideration as part of contemporary horror cinema, closely analysing remakes of key '70s genre films by horror auteurs with the same application of equivalent socio-political concerns perhaps over-emphasises their textual, allegorical 'importance'. Including new films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and *The Hills Have Eyes* as focal points in discussions of post-9/11 themes in horror not only risks ambiguous readings, but also both overlooks the commerciality of such films and their industry contexts, and ascribes an essentialist way of reading that aims to be comparable to their source texts, removing all other possible frameworks for understanding. This is not to suggest that an aesthetic familiar to the genre since 2001 cannot be observed in horror remakes produced in the last decade. Scenes of chaos, confusion and terror evoke the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, while a pervading sense of paranoia and apocalypticism recall government response and public opinions. Images of invasion, detainment and torture are recognisable from overly familiar media coverage of the subsequent War on Terror. Vietnam may have been the nation's first 'televised war', but imagery from military occupation in Iraq or Afghanistan, the treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the search for and subsequent execution of Osama Bin Laden, were all imbedded

in public consciousness through media saturation, continuous repetition on 24 hour news channels and online availability.

However, a number of the studies which observe references to such events in the remakes not only suggest that these elements can be found in the films as part of their wider generic characteristics, but often argue that the texts as whole should be understood as coherent allegories for post-9/11 American society. Otherwise, they make references to such metaphors in ways which are as fleeting (or inconsequential) as their coincidental appearances in the films themselves. David Bordwell (2008, 2008a) has challenged this scholarly and critical insistence on positioning films as allegorical reflections of the societal and cultural *Zeitgeist*. He argues that defining cinematic moments solely by their association with a particular political era neglects other, crucial areas for analysis and reduces audience engagement with the films to that of deep, socio-cultural resonance (ignoring other reasons viewers might chose to watch, e.g. for leisure, for social bonding, for curiosity). He suggests:

Reflectionist criticism throws out loose and intuitive connections between film and society without offering concrete explanations that can be argued explicitly. It relies on spurious and far-fetched correlations between films and social or political events [...] It assumes that popular culture is the audience talking to itself, without interference or distortion from the makers and the social institutions they inhabit. And the casual forces invoked – a spirit of the time, a national mood, and collective anxieties – may exist only as reified abstractions that the commentator turns into historical agents. (Bordwell 2008: 31)

The rest of this chapter uses Bordwell's argument on 'reflectionist criticism' as a framework for addressing problematic interpretations of the remakes, before moving on to consider the films themselves in an attempt to outline their ambiguous nature by way of response to claims of their social and political significance.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and *The Hills Have Eyes* are both included in Linnie Blake's study of contemporary 'hillbilly horror' films which 'pay

stylistic and conceptual homage to their 1970s predecessors in their exploration of the will to cultural and social heterogeneity demanded by the War on Terror as it was earlier demanded by the Vietnam conflict' (Blake 2008: 139). While discussion of Alexandre Aja's film in this context is relevant (if over-emphasised, as I will discuss in the following section), the inclusion of *Massacre* provides an awkward reading which does not appropriately address the film as an adaptation. Blake connects the film's 1973 setting to the release of *Southern Comfort* (Walter Hill, 1981) and 'hence the nation's defeat in the Vietnam War' (Blake 2008: 144), but not to the making of Hooper's original film. Furthermore, Leatherface's habit of wearing the skinned faces of his victims is described as:

a kind of neurotic mask behind which [he] hides, as assuredly as our own unspeakable psycho-sexual desires may be hidden behind a mask of social conformity; as sure as the unseen and faceless terrorist threat is said to invisibly pervade the paranoid nation that is America post-9/11. And as the film's framing device makes clear [...] he remains at large. For he can never be 'brought to justice' by a system he refuses to recognise. You can no more conquer that which is named 'the backwoods' that you can wage war on the abstract noun that is 'terror'. (Blake 2008: 145)

Blake's association of *Massacre*'s antagonist's mask with a 'faceless terrorist threat' is overstated. The character is, in part, intended to be sympathetic, and at any rate is partly humanised in the reboot (see chapter 4). Arguably, he does not even represent the most to fear from the Hewitt family (patriarch Sheriff Hoyt perhaps presents a greater threat – a calculating sadist operating under the pretence of authority). Furthermore, Blake ignores the most simple, and crucial, factor in Leatherface's mask-wearing habit. He is a new incarnation of an iconic monster in an equally iconic franchise, he wears skinned faces because *that is what Leatherface does*, and must do here if the remake even has a chance of acceptance by *Massacre* fans and/or familiar audiences.

While critical discourses of remakes frequently lament the removal or reduction of the perceived radical political messages of the originals, the majority of (largely negative) reviews of Nispel's *Massacre* -- journalistic, fan

sites and trade press included²¹ – failed to mention any such references at all, in relation to either their presence in Hooper's film or their absence from the new version. There were exceptions. For example, Mark Kermode (2003) and Sean Macauley (2003) bemoaned the loss of subtext, Michael Atkinson (2003) drew a connection between the film's Texan setting and the Presidential Bush family, and Dave Kehr (2003) referenced the 'monstrous family evolved from Richard Nixon's middle Americans' and the 'rotting nuclear family [...] exacting its final parental revenge on the flower-power generation' before observing that, in the remake, 'the killings have little sociological or psychological resonance'. Yet reviews often focused on Nispel's updating in the context of Michael Bay's involvement, the film's higher production values and associated aesthetic, and changes to story and characterisations instead. Blake's reading is thus not only restricted by its hesitance to consider such textual and industrial elements, and is oppositional to those other readings which argue that subtext is absent from the film, but it also seems distanced from the reception contexts of the remake. There is a suggestion, based on reviews and fan response, that any reference to the socio-political concerns of either its 1970s setting or its post-9/11 production were not only unanticipated in the remake, but that their lack was not a dominant factor in shaping response to the film.

It is not just Nispel's remake of Hooper's film which features in reflective academic analysis. The mall setting in *Dawn of the Dead* is interpreted by Aviva Briefel (2011) as presenting a similar anti-consumerism message to Romero's film. The mall is, Briefel states, antithetical to the 'commodification of patriotism' in post-9/11 rhetoric, a reaction to George W. Bush's appeal that 'we cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don't – where we don't conduct business, where people don't shop' (Briefel 2011: 142). Yet themes of consumerism in Snyder's film are largely treated as irrelevant (discussed below). Elsewhere, Shane Borrowman's essay on remakes of Romero's films considers changes in the 2004 version from the perspective of changing characters and their substitutive familial relationships,

²¹ See Foundas (2003), Newman (2003), Rosenbaum (2003), 'NF' (2003), French (2003), Atkinson (2003), Clark (2003), 'MrDisgusting' (2004), Kehr (2003), Ebert (2003) among others.

which renders the final paragraph of the section almost entirely unrelated to the rest of his discussion:

Too young when I saw the original to really make much of the subtext, I was considerably older in 2004. The opening scene of Muslims at prayer preyed on me, as did the final image, sandwiched amongst the credits: zombies charging the dock where the survivors of the mall have finally fetched up. These are the images of power in the post-September 11 world. It didn't take much to splice these images together, leaving me with an image of Islamic extremist hoards [sic] storming the last infidels. I couldn't stop smiling over my enjoyment of *Dawn* (2004), but it was a smile founded on a grimace and deployed in place of tears (Borrowman, 2009: 79).

The 'opening scene' to which he makes reference is a single shot, lasting little more than one second, which appears at the start of an opening credit montage ten minutes into the film. The sequence also contains stock footage of war, rioting and explosions, mixed with filmed shots indicating the spreading of the zombie virus and escalation of the epidemic. The image in this context is utilised as a kind of initiator (alongside news reports and government addresses) of increasing panic and disorder. Its inclusion, particularly as real footage contrasted with exaggerated filmed shots and news coverage, seems more likely a comment on media misinformation and saturation (this sequence also includes, like Romero's film, newsreaders providing incorrect information on safehouses), and furthermore contributes to the chaos and confusion which dominates the opening scenes of the film. It might equally be understood as a satirical attack on media which propagated anti-Islamic opinion in the wake of 9/11 (perhaps the reason why it 'did not take much' for Borrowman to 'splice' two unconnected images together), or a theological reflection on preparing for divine judgment as the apocalypse looms. Borrowman's connection of this image to the very final shots of the film (which are not dissimilar to many others throughout it) to draw an automatic assumption that the zombies of Snyder's film represent 'Islamic extremist hoards [sic]' is, in this sense, both tenuous and problematic (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: 'Islamic extremist hoards'? The first and last shots of *Dawn of the Dead*

In a chapter on slasher film remakes in his book *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (2012), Kevin J. Wetmore goes so far as to assert that 'the remade slasher film allows us to contain and control our terror at the faceless killers who are out to get us [...] Osama bin Laden is Jason, Freddy, Leatherface and especially Michael' (Wetmore 2012: 198), before suggesting that *Halloween's* Dr. Loomis' (Donald Pleasance) monologue describing his understanding of and relationship with his patient Myers ("[...] this six year old child with this blank, pale emotionless face with the blackest eyes, the devil's eyes. I spent eight years trying to reach him and then another seven trying to keep him locked up because I realized what was living behind that boy's eyes was purely and simply evil") could just as easily have been written by Donald Rumsfeld about Osama bin Laden:

you do not negotiate with Michael Myers. You do not try to understand him. You can only kill him to prevent him from killing you and others, because he is 'simply evil'. Michael will never be put on trial [...] Osama bin Laden would never have faced a jury; the only American response to that sense is to kill it outright. (Wetmore 2012: 199)

Wetmore's connection between these characters and terrorists, his description of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks as 'slasher film killers, threatening and killing with knives in order to bring about a larger set of murders' (Wetmore 2012: 200) represents perhaps the most spurious (and arguably insensitive) of these types of discussions; not least because the example he employs is from John Carpenter's 1978 film, not Rob Zombie's 2007 remake. But its over-

emphatic slant underlines the absolute nature of these kinds of studies and claims.

While there are undoubtedly references to images and themes present in the American public conscious of the last decade, these are, I would argue, often manifested in ambiguous metaphors, at most. In many cases, these references are eschewed or downplayed, and preference is given to paying homage to the originals or updating stylistic elements to reflect wider generic tendencies. To suggest that films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *The Hills Have Eyes* remake not only the original texts but, conveniently, their socio-political subtexts as well, is to ignore industry constraints and adaptive contexts. More pressingly, it encourages forced readings which are often simply ineffective, ungrounded or unsubstantiated. To suggest that a film made on the strength of its 'name value' and profit potential alone (as per Michael Bay's justification for *Massacre*), or by a significantly commercial filmmaker (such as Zack Snyder), should be explicitly understood as a text which purposefully comments on the socio-political concerns of post-9/11 American society, in the same way which films by auteurs such as George Romero did in the 1970s, risks over-emphasising their allegorical function. The following sections consider potential subtextual understandings of the remakes' socio-political themes, to assess and further challenge the legitimacy of such readings.

Ambiguity and Entertainment: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*

While the seventies versions of these films began to blur distinctions between the self and the monstrous Other, resulting in apocalyptic visions and locating horror closer to home, the *Chainsaw* remake draws an explicitly clear distinction between the good 'us' and the evil 'them'. The Hewitt family is comprised of a stereotypically grotesque, potentially inbred group, which ensures that the effectiveness of the original's imitation of the 'sit-com' family is completely lost in the remake. This is most noticeable in the lack of any equivalent of the

harrowing dinner table scene of Hooper's version. What was effective in the original as a comment on the decline of the nuclear family was that parody of traditional family mealtimes; it made the dynamics and relationships of the monstrous family clear, and provided a highly unsettling location for Sally's torture.

Furthermore, while Nispel's film strives to present Leatherface as marginally sympathetic, a victim of both disability and bullying, an understanding of the family's situation is strangely lost by excluding explicit references to cannibalism. For Hooper's Sawyer family, cannibalism was a reaction to unemployment and economic deprivation. Regardless of the glee with which Leatherface and the Hitchhiker arguably approach the capture and killing of their victims, they do so out of misplaced necessity and with purpose. Butchering passers-by and feeding on their flesh is an animalistic means for survival, but to a lesser extent also serves a social role in seeing the Sawyers continue with their 'work' – they may not be employed, but they fulfil their traditional socio-economic 'roles'. In the remake, cannibalism is only faintly implied by the suspiciously human looking strips of meat which hang in the kitchen. Self-sufficiency is implied through other means (a family-run diner, Hoyt's Sheriff identity), and thus any suggestion of cannibalistic tendency is likely included firstly as homage to the original family, but also to further their monstrous image. Eating human flesh apparently serves no real purpose for the Hewitts aside from fulfilling a sick and sadistic anthropophagical craving. Even if the family are not cannibals, their motivation for murder becomes purely psychopathic.

The 2003 film's excessive portrayal of the Hewitt family's innate evil is only exaggerated by the teen victims, who, in stark contrast to the clan's stereotypical ugliness, are an exceptionally attractive group. Sally's overweight, wheelchair bound brother Franklin (Paul A. Partain) is even replaced here for a more 'acceptable', able-bodied member, Morgan (Jonathan Tucker), who is presented as the 'geeky', outsider member of the group (and the only single traveller). But even contrasted against the model looks of the others, he is

marked out only by his small, slender frame and glasses. Just as the Hewitts are stereotypically 'backwoods' characters, so the group of friends are very 'all-American': white, middle class and relatively intelligent (at least when compared to their captors), their patriotism clearly symbolised by their clothing – blue jeans, cowboy hats and boots, baseball caps and shirts (see Figure 11). Despite presenting the group as identifiable, they are not especially likeable. With the exception of Erin, a typical (if ultimately very strong) Final Girl who neither drinks nor smokes, and wants for nothing but “a tear-cut diamond ring” to solidify Kemper’s commitment, the teens are rather selfish. This is most apparent in scenes where the group argue over the dead hitchhiker in their van. They laugh at the child Jedidiah and call him a “sick little mutant”. Morgan is especially concerned that police would be more interested in the marijuana they are smuggling back from Mexico than a suicide victim, and initiates a vote to decide whether to dump the body. Others are concerned about the inconvenience of having to contact the Sheriff, or the possibility that the incident will cause them to miss the Lynyrd Skynyrd concert for which tickets were “a fortune”. In opposition, while the Hewitts are clearly monstrous, this is embodied in the family’s female characters, especially Henrietta and the ‘Tea Lady’, thorough a sickly sweet, excessive ‘niceness’ and a false sense of concern for Erin. It is a fairly unconventional swap of character traits, but it further serves to draw oppositions between the two groups, dividing ‘us’ and ‘them’ clearly (it also prompts a typically conservative reading where the teens, aside from Erin, are punished not only for sex and drug use, but also their ‘rudeness’ and questionable morals).



Figure 11: The 'all-American' teens of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)

In Hooper's film, while it is not explicit where the protagonists are now living, the Hardesty siblings are clearly connected to the rural area to which they travel. They return to check on the grave of their grandfather following a spate of body snatching. Whilst there, they visit an abandoned family home, and Franklin is shown to be familiar with the old slaughterhouse and its practices (even discussing execution methods with his friends and the Hitchhiker) – and their ancestry and origins further blur the lines between the protagonists and the Sawyers. Conversely, the group in the 2003 remake are identified as total outsiders to the Texas wilderness. They are simply passing through, returning from a trip to Mexico, en route to the Skynyrd show before heading home. While it is never clear where Andy (Mike Vogel) is from, and exact locations are not determined, the others' home states are identified when Hoyt checks their driver's licences as he questions them. Erin mentions in the opening sequence that she and Kemper live together, and here that is established as being in Arizona. Pepper (Erica Leerhsen) is from Colorado, a hitchhiker the group picked up in El Paso, and "college boy" Morgan, as suggested by his baseball shirt emblazoned with his home state, is from New York. The differences between the group and the family distinctly reference that common opposition in contemporary horror between the civilised city dwellers and the monstrous backwoods folk of the rural deep South (Clover 1992).

The *Chainsaw* remake retains the 1973 setting of the original, perhaps rendering it an unsuitable vehicle for commentary on the socio-political climate in which it was made, regardless of the timeliness of its production. While it has been included in discussions of the post-9/11 horror film, the remake seems to have little substance in this regard and studies of its contemporary 'meaning' seem somewhat stretched. Setting the film at the same time as its source might in fact have allowed the opportunity to address some of the 1970s concerns in a way which could be interpreted as metaphorical reflections on events and opinions at the time of its production. Indeed, the prequel *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* could be seen as doing just this; set in 1969, its two young male protagonists Eric (Matthew Bomer) and Dean (Taylor Handley) are travelling across Texas with the intention of avoiding the draft and thus service in Vietnam, something they are severely punished for by Hoyt upon their capture. Generational and political dispute over a contentious war in this way might be read as metaphorically reflective of real-life debates taking place at the time (2006) over American invasion and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. The remake itself often misses opportunities to make even the slightest reference to Vietnam; for example, the bitter, legless and wheelchair bound character Old Monty (Terrence Evans) could have been identified as a war veteran (which might also go some way to explain Hoyt's hatred of "draft-dodgers"). His disability is not explained, however, until *The Beginning*, when it becomes clear he loses his legs to Leatherface's saw.

Strikingly, there is little allusion to the troubled decade within the remake at all. If the date was not pointed out in the titles, or if the group did not name drop Skynyrd, there would be little evidence to establish that the film's events do not take place today. Even the costumes do not obviously give away their era. The clothes which the group wear are largely 'timeless' in style, and while Erin and Morgan both wear flared trousers, they are barely noticeable in the film itself, promotional shots of the cast were clearly designed to better showcase the 1973 styling; these are 'hippies' as imagined and idealised by generation X filmmakers, not as represented in Hooper's cynical portrayal of the end of

countercultural values. A number of slightly anachronistic style choices further undermine the setting. Leatherface's chainsaw appears to be a far more modern version than that which Hansen wields in the original film, and 'Sweet Home Alabama', which Erin sings along to in Kemper's van, was not released until the following year. Furthermore, there is no mention of the economics of the time of *Chainsaw's* setting, and not just through the removal of the cannibalism-as-survival theme discussed above. The narrative device used in Hooper's version to ensure the teens could not escape the area quickly was an empty gas tank – highly plausible in the midst of a seventies fuel crisis. Here, it is the hitchhiker's shock suicide which prevents the group from leaving town. In short then, not only does *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake feature no apparent critique of contemporary socio-political concerns, but in adapting its 1970s setting for a modern audience, the film appears to lose any relevant allusions that the original once held.

Perhaps it is not retaining a period setting that makes *The Hills Have Eyes* more successful than *Chainsaw* in portraying some kind of political message. The remake is arguably a more coherent and effective horror film all round, no doubt due in part to director Alexandre Aja's experience in the genre and the involvement of Wes Craven, who not only produced the 2006 remake of his 1977 film but also instigated it. Aja had publicly discussed his desire to see a return to 'genuinely frightening' horror after a decade of postmodern genre fare in the wake of *Scream*, and Craven approached the director to discuss the possibility of remaking his film, of which Aja was apparently a fan, after seeing *Switchblade Romance*. The director has claimed of his version: 'It's a reflection of our time and our society and it came very naturally to us when we were writing the script. The idea that America has created a monster and this family have to confront it now' (anon 2006). Largely, Aja's *Hills* confronts this 'monster' through the presentation of sadistic and bloody violence, which not only furthers that of the original film, but also exceeds *Chainsaw's* remake. At a time when violence and gore in American genre cinema was becoming more visceral, *The Hills Have Eyes* was a notable example at the height of the torture porn trend

(see chapter 7 for further discussion). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the scene where Pluto (Michael Bailey Smith) and Lizard (Robert Joy) invade the Carters' trailer, raping Brenda (Emilie De Ravin), tormenting and murdering Lynn (Vinessa Shaw) and killing Ethel (Kathleen Quinlan). The comparative subtlety of the equivalent scene in Craven's film is replaced with an explicitly sadistic attack which pushes as many boundaries as possible. On the DVD commentary, even Craven sounds somewhat uncomfortable watching the scene: 'this was not in the original', he states flatly as Lizard suckles Lynn while pointing a gun at her baby.

Unlike *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* does have an apparent, and central, socio-political theme, even if it is difficult to establish its particular intention or meaning. A background story (which makes the implications of the original explicit here) portrays the villainous mountain dwellers as victims of 1950s' American foreign policy and Cold War logic. Miners who refused to obey government orders to leave their town, due to become a military-run nuclear testing site, subsequently suffered isolation and mutation caused by radiation, and their future generations became increasingly deformed through inbreeding. The 'test town' they still partially inhabit is an eerie and otherwise abandoned scene of 1950s Americana, devastated by fallout and populated by half-melted smiling mannequins. Craven refers to the setting as 'a comment of the death of the American Dream [...] it was a different world, and everybody thought that America was a great place [...] [the 1950s] was the last moment of innocence in American history' (in DVD commentary). The implication is that America created these monsters as a result of governmental policies and warped ideas around both self-preservation and supremacy; that the USA is not only capable but willing to risk destroying the lives of their own citizens in their attempt for world dominance. As one of the mutants laments to 'everyman' Doug (Aaron Stanford): "*you* made us what we've become". This sense of America destroying itself is underlined by shows of jaded, misplaced patriotism – a particularly repulsive mutant sings 'The Star

Spangled Banner' out of tune, and a pole flying the US flag is used by the monsters to spear patriarch Big Bob's (Ted Levine) face.

This sense of America 'bringing it on themselves' in *The Hills Have Eyes* could perhaps be read as a statement on the terrorist attacks of 9/11, specifically in relation to how the events have been understood as a fundamentalist response to hegemonic capitalist American imperialism. However, this suggestion is frequently undermined throughout the film. Like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, *The Hills Have Eyes* draws very clear distinctions between the good 'self' and the evil 'other', and once again this is largely achieved by breaking down the family unit of the original, here removing that element of Craven's film which resulted in the families mirroring each other and confused the binaries between 'good' and 'bad'. As with *Massacre*'s Hewitt family, the dynamics of the relationships between the mutants are never clearly established, suggesting they have more of a connection as a form of tribe than one as a family unit, and despite the addition of their sympathetic backstory, they are more violent, more sadistic, and even more grotesque than their 1970s counterparts, with prosthetic mutations that border on being cartoonish. The Carters, meanwhile, are generally more likeable than Craven's 'good' family (with the exception of controlling racist Big Bob) and their violent acts are justified by a sense of necessity less evident in the original. While Bobby and Brenda use their mother's body as bait in the 1977 version, here they respectfully move it to the safety of the car before blowing up their trailer. Doug's acts, although increasingly brutal, are always within the context of a fight with one of the antagonists and are thus defensive. He (and the audience) are constantly reminded of his need for violence in the cries of the baby he is searching for, and the close ups of his wedding ring – he must save his daughter, and along the way, he avenges the death of his wife. His violent rampage acts as a conservative rite of passage, from the gentle 'new man' who is constantly derided by his wife and father-in-law to the protective hero patriarch who (unlike the Doug of the 1977 film), once he has defeated the

enemy and saved his daughter, discards his weapons and returns to his remaining family, justifying his savagery.

The Carters of the new version can be seen, one critic argued, as both 'slightly retro and a microcosm of post-9/11 Yanks' (Koehler 2006). Ethel is a now-religious 'mother hen' figure who was once a hippie, and the tension between Doug and Big Bob evidently stems from their polarising political beliefs. "Leave Doug alone", Bob mocks early in the film, "he's a Democrat, he doesn't believe in guns". Regardless of their differences, the Carters are clearly a representation of an all-American family, and the mutants (even with the nuclear testing back-story) are a vicious Other, who strike without warning and must be defeated. This is clearly symbolised when Doug, reaching the end of a long fight with Pluto, pulls the American flag out of Big Bob's head and thrusts it through the mutant's neck: 'The flag, slick with blood, protrudes from Pluto's corpse; a symbol of victory, of the modern man overcoming desperate odds, of American power overcoming the ambiguous metaphor the mutants imply' (Rose, 2006) (see Figure 12). 'Ambiguous metaphor' is perhaps the best way to describe any sociological or political message in *The Hills Have Eyes*. While there are numerous elements which could be interpreted as metaphorical reflections on post-9/11 America, thus marking it as a fairly politically minded remake, it is uncertain exactly what point the film is trying to make, if any. The audience who infers any meaning is left wondering whether to sympathise with the villains as victims of an America past or root for the American family in their defeat of a supposedly 'foreign' enemy – when to understand the villains as foreign means ignoring their historical belonging to America's most affluent and commercial period of growth and power.



Figure 12: 'American power overcoming ambiguous metaphor' in *The Hills Have Eyes*

The Hills Have Eyes II (Martin Weisz, 2007), although not a remake of Craven's 1985 sequel to his original film, is worth discussion here as, while the sly comments on patriotism are missing, the film's political stance is apparent. In this sequel, a group of National Guard trainees battle the mutants in the desert, and their deaths are largely the result of their own fatal mistakes; they leave their weapons visible for the villains to steal, and accidentally shoot each other, for example. Comments on military ineptitude and an anti-war sentiment are clear from early sequences set during a training exercise (a staged assault on terrorists in Kandahar) where the reactionary recruits foolishly respond to anti-American jibes from actors, drop their own guns to cover their ears from explosions, and fall for a 'suicide bomber's pretence as a pregnant woman, resulting in the staged death of many civilians as well as their own. However, as with the first film, any serious political statement the sequel may be trying to make is diluted – in this case, by the absurdity of the violent, gory scenes. A mutant chops the hand off of a soldier hanging on to a cliff edge and uses it to wave goodbye as he falls, a man is pulled through a hole in a mountainside with such ferocity that he folds in half, and a scientist dies when he is infected by faecal matter. The only serious violence in the film manifests itself in misogynistic scenes: an incarcerated woman is forced to give birth to a mutant baby before having her head caved in with a rock, and the capture, repeated rape and brutal beating of Missy (Daniella Alonso) is sadistic and gratuitously

violent. Like the 2006 film (and similarly to the *Chainsaw* prequel), *The Hills Have Eyes II* could be read as making some political statements, but again their exact message is unclear.

As with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, it appears that there was little anticipation that Aja's *Hills* would feature any form of political commentary. While many reviews observed the nuclear testing story, few of them drew any metaphorical parallels to reflections on post-9/11 American society, most critics instead focused on the violence and gruesomeness of the remake, aligning it (for better or worse) with emerging trends (see Koehler 2006, Kipp 2006, Atkinson 2006, Tilly 2006, Ebert 2006, Puig 2006). One (positive) reviewer even suggested that the inclusion of any message would be both unnecessary and detract from the film's true purpose:

Our nation's artists are so obsessed with terrorism these days, even Batman is planning to put the smackdown on al Qaeda. In a world where Osama bin Laden still walks free, who really cares if the government conducted some nuclear tests in Nevada a few decades ago, and a few stupid miners didn't get out in time? [...] Because falling buildings have replaced mushroom clouds in most of our nightmares, the movie must thrive purely on its entertainment value, and it does. Cold War or no Cold War, "The Hills Have Eyes" is a blast. (Hartlaub 2006).

This particular review is in opposition to the common critical consensus regarding horror remakes' pointlessness (which do feature in the opinions of the critics listed above), and it usefully illustrates that entertainment might well be the purpose of any film. Imposing proscriptive interpretations on to films unintended as political vehicles not only results in ambiguous readings, but also ignores other contexts and reasons for the films' production.

Remaking Romero: *Dawn of the Dead* and *The Crazies*

While many American horror films of the 1970s have collectively been widely understood as politically engaged and overtly allegorical, the work of one filmmaker in particular has been consistently discussed as radical, important

and auteurist examples of reflections of socio-political concerns of the era. George Romero ushered in this new cycle of horror cinema with *Night of the Living Dead*, and while not a prolific director, his films remained prevalent throughout the years which define the genre at the time, continuing his 'dead trilogy' with *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978 (and completing it in 1985 with *Day of the Dead*), and also directing the *The Crazies* (1973) and vampire tale *Martin* (1977). It is undoubtedly, at least in part, Romero's well-established position as a 'polemical and insightful critic of American culture' (Phillips 2012: 4) which has led to his films being remade more than those of any other director. In addition to the remakes of his 1970s films, *Day of the Dead* was remade by Steve Miner in 2008 (and a second remake is reportedly in production, Chitwood 2013), and there are multiple versions and parodies of *Night of the Living Dead* (aided by the film's position in the public domain due to an error over rights ownership), notably including a 1990 remake by Tom Savini, and most recently a 2006 3D version. This section focuses on the new versions of the 1970s films, comparing the themes of Snyder (*Dawn of the Dead*) and Eisner's (*The Crazies*) films with those of Romero's originals to assess any similar or equivalent meanings.

Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* homages Romero's original through cameo appearances by the original cast and crew, and the repetition of a number of iconic lines. Tom Savini appears as a local sheriff being interviewed on television, Ken Foree, here as a televangelist discussing the impending zombie apocalypse, predicts doom with his famous line "when there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth", and equivalent characters duplicate Romero's dialogue ("why are they coming here?", "Memory, maybe. Instinct".) But these references, the zombie epidemic, and the mall setting aside, *Dawn* is a very different film to its predecessor. The director's past in music videos and advertisements is (as with Nispel's filmic debut *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) made clear in the visual style of the film; the darker palette and rapid editing contrasting with the almost cartoonish bright colours and long takes of the 1978 version. *Dawn* 2004 resembles a fast paced, high concept, action blockbuster more than it does a low budget horror film. Even Romero's slow and

deliberately stupid zombies are replaced with sprinting monsters – a revision to the sub-genre which had already featured in *28 Days Later*. The group of four protagonists who provide the focus of the original film are replaced here with an ensemble of, at their highest count, seventeen survivors. This change does offer an added dimension to the relationships which Romero created, allowing friendships and romances to blossom, but otherwise this appears to be for the purpose of enabling as many on-screen deaths (and instant reanimations) as possible, enhancing the action and ensuring a continued fast pace.

Despite a mostly positive reception, the remake was criticised for bypassing the satirical anti-capitalist message of Romero's film (see Rosenbaum 2004, Russell 2004, 'SJS' 2004, Malcolm 2004, Foundas 2004, Ebert 2004). The mall is here utilised only as a location, rather than as a deliberate comment on consumerism. The recreation of the montage in which the characters go 'shopping' – indulgently picking out goods at will and without financial transaction in abandoned, unattended stores – is presented here as a more enjoyable and shared experience than in the original. The characters laugh together at television shows played on state-of-the-art entertainment systems, and film themselves having casual sex in expensive lingerie. The equivalent sequence in the 1978 film only served to highlight both the meaninglessness of material possession and the solitude and loneliness which the protagonists felt, exemplified in the shots of Fran skating alone on a vast, isolated ice rink. David Church has referred to the remake as 'the very sort of consumer commodity that Romero detested in the first place' (Church 2006), echoing sentiments expressed by critics upon the film's release. However, such criticism fails to observe that Snyder is not of Romero's generation; he was born in the late sixties, and grew up during the eighties in a time of swift economic growth following the recession which troubled earlier filmmakers. The target audience for the remake would be even younger, born into a decade that was not just financially stable, but booming. By the early 2000s and the time of the film's conception, consumerism was no longer a rising, prevalent social issue. It was an innate element of American society and culture, an accepted fact of life

(even a way of life) for Snyder's Generation X, and his largely Generation Y audience, and thus arguably not a relevant thematic concern for his film to address.²²

Aviva Briefel describes how the protagonists in Romero's film sparsely furnish the empty upstairs offices of their mall, while Snyder's group set up home within the stores themselves (see Figure 13): 'for Romero [the mall] is a space of acquisition, while for Snyder it is one of habitation' (Briefel 2011: 152). While Briefel ascribes this observation to a 'post-9/11 fantasy of appropriating and altering consumer culture from within' (Briefel 2011: 152), I would argue that the relative ease and comfort with which the survivors 'settle in' to their showroom homes only affirms the status quo, the mall as habitat, shopping as part of twenty-first century American life. The remake even draws attention to its position as a commercial product of Hollywood industry, advertising its status and connections to Romero's film through cast and crew cameos – a women's clothing store is even named 'Gaylen Ross', effectively labelling the actor as commodity.



Figure 13: The mall as home, and café as kitchen in *Dawn of the Dead*

Despite this, there are other ways in which Snyder's film alludes to the original's themes. The casting of Ving Rhames as Kenneth, and Mekhi Phifer

²² It is important to note here, of course, that a number of films from the late 1990s onwards – *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) and *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000), for example – did satirically address American consumerist culture at this time, and thus the topic was not entirely irrelevant. However, Snyder's film cannot be aligned with such examples, and is further distanced by comparisons with Romero's original.

and Inna Korobkina as interracial couple Andre and Luda, is 'in keeping with Romero's multi-ethnic protagonists' (Osmond 2004) (Rhames also appears in the *Day of the Dead* remake). Megalomaniacal, feckless security guard CJ (Michael Kelly), embodies both Romero's scorn for incompetent authority figures, and the way in which both *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead* suggested that giving ignorant men guns often rendered them just as dangerous as the zombies they fought. It should be noted however, that, unlike Romero's SWAT team or rednecks, CJ ultimately redeems himself by sacrificing his life to save those of the remaining members of the group so that they can escape, and he posthumously earns their respect. The media and the status given to celebrities are also mocked, both in the script ("TV says you gotta shoot him in the head", "TV says a lot of things"), and in a scene where Kenneth and Andy (Bruce Bohne) shoot at the crowd of zombies surrounding the mall by picking out and taking pot shots at those who look like television personalities (Jay Leno, Rosie O'Donnell) – a sequence one critic described as 'one of the film's truly Romero-esque touches' (Osmond 2004).

What the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* conveys well is the sense of nihilistic apocalypticism so prevalent in the seventies horrors which arguably remains relevant today. The ten minute pre-credit sequence is bookended by aerial shots of American suburbia – the first calm and peaceful, the second, as Ana (Sarah Polley) flees her reanimated husband, chaotic, bloody and falling apart – signifying that civilisation has collapsed overnight. Commuters tear each other apart, cars crash, neighbourhoods burn and gas stations explode. The scene is followed with the opening credits, comprised of newsreel style footage of zombie attacks intercut with stock footage of riots, attacks, explosions and military interventions. These were created, according to Snyder in the DVD commentary, to give the impression of 'the collapse of our society as it happens'. The panic, confusion and chaos in these initial scenes evokes memories of immediate responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the footage shot by witnesses and broadcast on television news – nobody knows exactly what is happening, who has caused it, or why. The film's final scenes similarly

have a cynical tone. While several of the characters escape on a boat, suggesting the promise of a happy ending, a satisfactory narrative resolution is eventually denied. Scenes played out over the end credits show the escapees running out of food, then fuel, drifting until they reach a seemingly deserted island, where they are promptly attacked by an undead horde. The suggestion is that, no matter how hard survivors try or where they flee to, the virus will cross oceans – succeeding in taking over not only America, but the world.

However, it is worth noting that this apocalyptic tone is really most apparent in the opening scenes, and is quickly lost once Ana meets other survivors and they head to the mall. While there are some attacks on the media and celebrity, and racially diverse casting, these are minor references to Romero's films and, overall, any close analysis of the text yields little results with regards to any hidden political subtext. George Romero himself has stated that while he did not actively dislike Snyder's reworking, he felt that it 'completely lost its reason for being' (Romero, in D'Agnolo-Vallan 2005). Regardless, Snyder's version was financially successful, and largely well received by critics, particularly in the wake of and in comparison to the criticism levelled at the previous year's *Massacre* remake. *Dawn* was praised for its success as a film in its own right, and for being 'well above the pedestrian standard of most genre remakes' (Ide 2004), perhaps largely because, while updating his source material so completely, Snyder included enough references to the original to interest its fans, while never attempting anything which might be perceived as 'sacrilegious' (running zombies aside). It also ignited a revived interest (aided by *Shaun of the Dead*) in Romero's original which allowed the production of the director's *Land of the Dead* (2005) (D'Agnolo-Vallan 2005).

Romero's *The Crazies* (1973) is both an unmistakable critique of the American military and a possible reaction to governmental secrecy and conspiracy in the wake of Watergate. The film is given a split perspective, by dividing the narrative between following a group of survivors of a viral outbreak, and the officials responsible for controlling the epidemic. As the film progresses, we learn that the virus – which causes insanity and homicidal urges in otherwise

placid residents – is the result of a top-secret and untested biological weapon (codenamed 'Trixie', which is fairly innocuous sounding at first but comes to connote the authorities' trickery and deception), accidentally released into a small town's water supply after an army plane crashes nearby. The initial unwillingness of government and military spokespersons to explain the situation to the people of Evans City, including the local police and resident doctor whose help they need to secure, might be in order to prevent panic. But this is undermined by their (largely silent) men on the ground, unrecognisable and alien-looking in hazmat suits, who take terrified families from their homes by force with no explanation or prior request for evacuation, and shoot down the infected in front of people who have no idea of what is happening. Continued discussions, first with a panel of unidentified officials and then with the American President (who keeps his back to the camera during a satellite video conversation as if not wanting to be entirely present), emphasise a need for the story to remain concealed, and the prioritising of confidentiality and containment over finding a cure or retaining human lives. This is most evident in the lack of humanity shown by the President as he gives his permission for potential nuclear intervention to destroy the town, if necessary. As military action intensifies, so the situation becomes worse, their presence ultimately inciting rioting and protest. A priest burns himself to death in the street after his congregation are forcibly removed from church, in a scene visually evocative of the by-then widely recognisable image of a burning Thich Quang Duc, the Vietnamese monk who protested Buddhist persecution in South Vietnam through self-immolation in 1963. Soldiers laugh as they go through the possessions of a man they killed, counting and taking his money before throwing the body on a pile of burning corpses. The scenario is an unambiguous attack on military interventionism, ineptitude and brutality.

Less apparent, but no less relevant, is a comment on the effect of war upon not only civilians but also drafted personnel. As the soldiers blindly and cruelly follow their orders, it becomes apparent that two of the film's protagonists, David (W.D. McMillan) and Clank (Harold Wayne Jones),

previously served in Vietnam. While the two men do not elaborate much on their experiences, it is clear from Clank's assertion that "the army ain't nobody's friend, man [...] we know, we've been in", that they view the military with suspicion and distrust. Late in the film it is insinuated that Clank has caught the virus, as he rampages, maniacally killing soldiers and muttering under his breath incoherently about Green Berets and congressional medals. A distinction is drawn here between him and David, who we learn was part of the elite special force; the futility of military hierarchy is highlighted as Clank rants at his bewildered and helpless friend "tell me what to do David [...] with your big green hat" (it is also possible that this is a barbed attack on unrealistic portrayals of military 'heroism' in Vietnam such as the much-maligned *The Green Berets* [Ray Kellogg, John Wayne & Mervyn LeRoy, 1968]). Clank's response to the virus suggests he suffers from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder associated with his veteran status, and this in addition to the men's post-army lives (they are both voluntary firemen, a continuation of their 'service' roles) and the repeated use of the melody from 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' (including scoring Clank's death) could be understood as a critique of both military and government failure to look after its Vietnam veterans. Furthermore, the murderous rage symptomatic of the virus suggests drafted servicemen becoming homicidal in their duties; victims are 'drafted' by the virus, and begin to take some kind of pleasure in killing each other, rendering them as much 'killing machines' as the soldiers. David speculates that "maybe we *are* in a war", and in response to the suggestion that the army "might be here to help", he observes "whatever they're here for it has turned into a riot. Maybe they are just here for control [...] but they can turn a campus protest into a shooting war, and with some of the rednecks in this area, they could be shooting each other and not even know why".

Unlike Romero's film, which focuses on both the group fleeing the containment and the government and military officials who instigate it, Breck Eisner's 2010 remake of *The Crazies* tells its story from the perspective of the residents only, from initial viral breakout and confusion, through the arrival of

the army and containment of the infected, to attempted escape from the town. The protagonists are all figures with recognisable local authority or esteem – David (Timothy Olyphant) is the Sheriff, Russell (Joe Anderson) his Deputy, his wife Judy (Radha Mitchell) is the town's doctor, and Beca (Daniele Panabaker) is her assistant. David and Judy's roles provide opportunities for early, first-hand encounters of the virus; the film opens with a sequence in which the Sheriff confronts, and eventually shoots and kills, Rory Hamill (Mike Hickman), who heads purposefully into a high school baseball field in the middle of a well-attended game with a loaded shotgun. Subsequently, Judy has a consultation with a resident concerned about the strange behaviour of her husband – who that night burns down the family home with her and their son locked inside.

Their jobs both emphasise the severity of the burgeoning epidemic (it cannot be handled by police and general medical practitioners alone, and requires army intervention and martial law) and underline the community nature of the town, Ogden Marsh. This is a place where each resident knows everyone else and their business. David is aware that Hamill is a recovering alcoholic and assumes drunkenness is the cause of his psychopathic behaviour, and Judy is close enough to the family killed in the fire to feel her own remorse and anger at their death. This familiarity is part of a broader sense of friendship, tight community ties and small town pride as a microcosm of American societal values not apparent in Romero's film – numerous American flags fly high on Main Street and the baseball field, David wears an Ogden Marsh baseball shirt, the high school Principal buys him coffee, and conversations with Hamill's widow take place with David occupying the role of supportive friend rather than an officer of the law.

In emphasising the community nature of the small town, so the military are rendered more of an alien force, less visible, less human even than the military of Romero's film (see Figure 14). In the 1973 version, we are privy to scientific developments and martial strategies which unfold in the narrative in parallel with the survivors' story, and even provided with semi-sympathetic representational characters in the form of scientist Dr. Watts (Richard France),

a co-creator of Trixie striving to create a cure, and Colonel Peckam (Lloyd Hollar), sent in to manage and co-ordinate the operation. In Eisner's film, there are no such figures. The first thirty minutes features only the inhabitants of Ogden Marsh, struggling to deal with the escalating crisis. By the time David and Judy first encounter the military, the operation is already in place. Despite their protests, and the uniforms which mark out both David and Russell's authority, they are forced onto a commandeered school bus by hazmat-suited men without explanation, and taken to a makeshift camp which has taken over the school playing field. Here, they are marched through gates and tunnels, meeting refusals from soldiers each time they ask questions. Their temperatures are taken, Judy's apparently reading feverishly high, indicating probable infection, and the pair are separated. David is punched by a soldier in a blow so hard it knocks him unconscious, Judy is dragged off and strapped into a stretcher and anaesthetised, not one of the doctors responding to her screaming that she is pregnant.



Figure 14: Hazmat-suited, alien outsiders in *The Crazies*

This emphasised inhumane and brutal portrayal of the armed forces and their actions (dropped briefly when the protagonists later capture and question a maskless soldier who tells them that his squad did not know what they were facing, or even which state they had been flown into until they saw vehicle licence plates, and asserts “I didn’t sign up to shoot unarmed civilians”) could be understood as an attempt to underline an ‘us and them’ binary not as evident in

the blurred oppositions of Romero's film (in a similar strategy to the *Massacre* and *Hills* remakes). Yet it is confused by a failure to clearly define a singular enemy. The 'crazies' of 1973 are largely sympathetic, if terrifying: like Romero's zombies, they are sad, shambolic versions of creatures which were once human. They still have human urges, remember connections and often show confused remorse at their actions. In Eisner's film, they are unflinchingly violent and more sadistic. This is particularly evident in an early scene at the hospital where David encounters people, alive but incapacitated, their eyes and lips crudely sewn together by an infected mortician, who subsequently attacks him with an electric bone saw. This infection does not cause strictly murderous rampages as much as it incites a desire to torture and torment (this is also evident in Russell's later bullying of David and Judy as his virus takes over). *The Crazies* (2010) features alien invasion in the form of its faceless and cruel army, but it is also a film which suggests that evil is already present in the small town, and indeed, as suggested by the tagline for promotional materials in the US, the residents of Ogden Marsh should learn to 'fear thy neighbour', in a reversal of their mid-West, middle-class, Christian small town values.

While confusing exactly who 'the enemy' is, *The Crazies* remake could be understood as a liberal allegory for an America bent on self-destruction as much as it could be a possible reflection on military occupation in Iraq or Afghanistan. For example, the opening scene threatens a mass shooting at a school by a lone gunman, evoking memories of such events as well as very real and present concerns around gun control and associated violence, and the earliest victims to fall to the virus represent both the neglected working classes (the patient Judy sees is a farmer) and anti-social behaviour (Hamill is widely known as the 'town drunk'). Meanwhile, references to war, invasion and occupation are present in the unexplained town invasion by mask-wearing soldiers (who are more frequently seen in their camouflaged uniforms than in the hazmat suits so prominent in Romero's version), musical choices both diegetic (a man whistles 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' in homage to Romero's version) and non-diegetic (a dark Johnny Cash cover of Vera Lynn's

'We'll Meet Again' plays over the opening credits), makeshift detainee camps, and aerial surveillance footage of Ogden Marsh. In the closing scene, this footage shifts to the adjacent (and much larger) town which David and Judy head to after their own is obliterated in a nuclear attack, suggesting their neighbours are next.

Yet, while Eisner's film retains a certain sense of paranoia, any specific message is (as with the other remakes) indistinct. *The Crazies* (2010) is certainly critical of its brutish military and faceless government, but in a way which remains open to interpretation:

The remake dispenses with these nuances [of Romero's film], turning the military into a vague, malevolent force that spies from above on Ogden Marsh, then quarantines or removes the townspeople. By doing so it exploits the enmity, across the political spectrum, for people in power. Its sour view of government intervention would suit both the American Left in the Bush-Cheney era and the Tea Party today. (Corliss 2010)

Such ambiguities, of course, avoid alienating any particular audience sector by ensuring that any subjective interpretation can be influenced by a viewer's individual opinions and beliefs. Distinctly expressing a particular political stance risks limiting appeal, and increasingly themes in contemporary Hollywood films are left open for personal readings by viewers from across the political spectrum (*The Dark Knight Rises*, for example, might be considered either fascist or sympathetic to the Occupy movement, depending on the approach and inclinations of the person watching it). But the vagueness of these themes also suggests, once more, that the deliberate construction of any socio-cultural or politically motivated 'message' is not the aim of such films, and that horror remakes should, therefore, not be considered solely on the basis of how effectively they adapt such perceived messages in original films – not least when these metaphors have perhaps become over stressed.

Conclusion

The case studies in this chapter have shown how interpretations of the 1970s horror remake as radical political allegories for post-9/11 American society are over-emphasised and inconclusive. I have suggested, through consideration of the films' critical reception, that remakes are not necessarily concerned with constructing a 'message', that commercial imperatives such as retaining broad audience appeal, or identification with originals, are more important (given this last point, it might even be suggested that any vague metaphors the films do feature are perhaps included in order to further 'honour' their sources).

Furthermore, critical reaction often indicates that such themes were often never anticipated. Its lack, however, does appear to remain a problem for a number of critics (Church, 2006, Macauley 2003, Bacal 2004, Simon 2006, Kermode 2003), and those examples of Bordwell's 'reflectionist criticism' in Blake, Wetmore and Borrowman's studies suggest that the dominant scholarly approach to understanding the films is to insist on asserting what the remakes *might* be 'saying', regardless of the fact that this may be the least interesting, relevant, or apparent thing about them. In conclusion, it is worth addressing why such insistence prevails, and so often yields unfounded and unsatisfactory results.

Because they emphasise violence and are noticeably gorier than their 1970s counterparts, the remakes are often aligned with a contemporaneous torture porn trend by way of disassociating them from their originals. While it is at least true that they might feature similar iconography and aesthetics to films such as *Hostel* and *Saw* (James Wan 2004), the association of any contemporary genre film with this label risks the imposition of a particular interpretation of its themes. David Edelstein's article in *New York* magazine, which posited the term, aligned the trend with post-9/11 debates surrounding the ethics of torture, debates 'fuelled by horrifying pictures of manifestly decent men and women (some of them, anyway) enacting brutal scenarios of domination at Abu Ghraib' (Edelstein 2006). Metaphorical associations with 9/11, the subsequent War on Terror and associated paranoia, and media

circulated images of abused prisoners, have been made by critics and academics in discussions of many of the films, especially *Hostel* and *Cabin Fever* (in addition to Edelstein, see Goodwin 2006, Totaro 2006, Mendik 2002 & 2006, Newman 2006, Kendall, 2005; Wilson, 2006, 2007, Church, 2006). While there are issues with a number of these interpretations and the way in which the 'torture porn' label groups together a disparate group of texts (this is discussed further in the next chapter), these films do undoubtedly allude to contemporary socio-political concerns, and their references are apparent to fans as well as critics. As filmmaker Adam Simon noted: 'The same kids lining up to see *Saw* // or *Hostel* know exactly where to go online to see execution videos from Iraq or uncensored footage of bodies falling on 9/11' (in Goodwin 2006).

Other horror sub-genres have further alluded to the events of 9/11 through imagery and aesthetic, rather than providing direct allegories or any explicit political message. The found-footage film, for example, took cues from the innumerable witness videos of the attacks to make sense of the way the event was processed. This is evident in *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008) in both the chaos that surrounds the destruction of an iconic Manhattan landmark (here, the Statue of Liberty) and the eerie emptiness of paper-strewn streets in the calm wake of the carnage, and in George Romero's insistence that his *Diary of the Dead* was less about contemporary 'happenings', but instead 'the relentless impulse to record them' (in Lee, 2007). The association of the 1970s remakes to horror films which more obviously reference the concerns of post-9/11 America naturally draws comparisons as to their effectiveness, and against such examples, the remake's social significance falls short. Equally, critics have argued that the films 'miss the point' that their predecessors made – but there seems little 'point' in reiterating the now largely irrelevant concerns of 1970s America. Divorce and extended families are now commonplace, so why comment on the collapse of the nuclear family? Consumerism is an accepted way of life. American foreign policy through the 2000s and 2010s, although controversial, has not been as divisive a subject as the Vietnam War was for American citizens in the 1970s. And as far as the apocalypse goes, 9/11 is

perhaps as close to Armageddon as America has come, and yet life, however changed, continues.

It is generally accepted that horror cinema re-emerges and thrives, with a new approach and new monstrous figures, in times of societal collapse, political difficulties and cultural shifts. The genre is a useful vehicle for allegorical reference to the concerns of the time in which its films are made. Given that American society in the seventies was marked by pessimism, anger, confusion and a lack of confidence in its institutions, it is unsurprising that the horror films produced during this period have come to be seen as radical reflections of these concerns. And yet, as I have suggested elsewhere within this chapter, such understandings are largely retrospective and ignore ambiguity on the part of the filmmakers. They are also highly selective, focusing on only a few examples and conveniently ignoring a number of seemingly less progressive (but arguably more coherent) horror cycles or subgenres which produced a great number of films throughout the decade: splatter films (*The Wizard of Gore*, *I Drink Your Blood*, David Durston, 1970, *The Gore Gore Girls*, Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1973, *Bloodsucking Freaks*, Joel M. Reed, 1976), Blaxploitation horror (*Blacula*, William Crain, 1972, *Blackenstein*, William A. Levy, 1973, *Scream Blacula Scream*, Bob Kelljan, 1973, *Dr. Black, Mr Hyde*, William Crain, 1976), religious/demonic horror (*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*), and creature features (*Jaws*, Steven Spielberg, 1975, *Grizzly*, William Girdler, 1976, *Orca*, Michael Anderson, 1977, *Piranha*) included.

Remakes of seventies films will always face over-analysis and criticism because 'the era has become enshrined in Hollywood myth as the benchmark of gritty, challenging, anti-establishment film-making' (Macauley 2005); and this is evident in the reception of the remakes in question here. The seventies horrors were not necessarily radical because they *featured* allusion to contemporary concerns, however, but because they came out of a radical period in American history, and naturally, therefore, directors like Romero, Craven and Hooper were reflecting on the concerns of their generation. The 1970s was a period of confusion, political apathy, pessimism and upheaval in

American society, the extent of which has not been felt since. The years since 2001 are possibly the closest the country has come to echoing the concerns of such a tumultuous decade, and the new wave of American horror cinema has only just begun to reflect the contemporary concerns of its society; as David Church notes, within the genre, 'the very absence of more telling clues about the American mentality in the post-911 period is itself perhaps indicative of the event of the trauma' (Church 2010: 238).

The remake should not – and cannot – be held entirely responsible for such metaphorical reflections. The insistence of understanding adaptations in this way, and with direct comparison to their sources, can often distract from what the film is actually doing on its own terms. Including political messages and cultural criticism is of secondary importance to commercial appeal, generic association and audience appeasement. Furthermore, a large sector of the remake's audience is unlikely to have seen the original, and issues of fidelity, including those around its socio-political commentary, are thus unlikely to be a concern for the very people to which the films are intended to appeal. This chapter has shown how, rather than being either entirely without meaning or all-encompassing allegorical vehicles, we can understand horror remakes, in the contexts of their themes and ideologies, as vague and ambiguous, and that, given the multitude of ways in which to approach their study, acknowledging as much does not negate their significance or purpose.

Chapter 7: Gender and Genre in the Rape-revenge Remake

The previous chapter examined how a selected number of films from the 1970s were updated for a contemporary audience. I argued that ultimately, their purpose was not as allegorical vehicles for any political 'message' which has often been ascribed to their originals, but to appeal to modern horror viewers by aligning themselves with recent genre trends. It is worth further considering how remakes of other films from this era might do this while also adapting for changed societal and cultural values, and associated representations – in this instance, of gender. 1970s rape-revenge films and their remakes provide a useful example. Critically vilified but later the subject of feminist studies, these films were popular among fans of exploitation film, but marginal in a way which suggests they may not have been the most obvious choices to be remade. Yet two films in particular, *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave*, remade just over a year apart, show how filmmakers adapt content to be more acceptable to both a broader horror audience and an increasingly female one. Changes are made to the narrative, tone and aesthetic of the films; at the same time, as they must appeal to female viewers, the remakes also work to adapt the portrayal of their female protagonists and address problematic elements of the original films – with different degrees of success.

Simultaneously, both are coded explicitly as horror films, introducing heightened levels of suspense and common horror tropes, and emulating contemporary genre trends, notably the inclusion of explicit, visceral scenes of torture which enable the films' potential alignment with torture porn. The evolution of horror cinema throughout the 2000s saw an increased shift towards visual presentations of brutal violence and gore, and a number of plots focused on retributive justice and personal revenge. The state of the genre at the end of the decade provided an ideal opportunity for remaking controversial films that might otherwise be difficult to market to a more mainstream horror audience,

and we can here understand torture porn as a framework for the reception of films such as *I Spit* and *Last House*.

Reactions to both films were largely negative, a mixed response of indifference, derision and disgust. With the exception of a handful of positive reviews, mostly on horror forums (see for example Newman 2011, Hayes 2010, McCannibal 2010, Weinberg 2009, 'MrDisgusting' 2009), the new versions attracted criticism that, while frequently acknowledging marked improvements on the originals (such as performance, script and cinematography), repeatedly drew attention to the perceived pointlessness of remaking the films. Excerpts from some of the more negative reviews highlight this opinion, suggesting *I Spit on Your Grave*, for example, is 'a completely worthless enterprise that offers nothing to the world other than the crushing realisation that it exists' (Hall 2010), and describing it as 'witless, ugly and unnecessary [...] a generic, distasteful and pointless photocopy of a flick that doesn't deserve one' (Weinberg 2010). (for similar responses to *Last House*, see also Kasch 2009, Ebert 2009, Tobias 2009, Bradshaw 2009, Newman 2009a). As I discussed in chapter 3, discourses of insignificance often feature in responses to horror remakes. Yet the criticism levelled at the rape-revenge films seem excessive by comparison, and is accompanied in many cases by vitriolic comment on their violent content. In a review that reflects upon his own, now infamous, response to Meir Zarchi's film (Ebert 1980), Roger Ebert refers to this new version as a 'despicable remake' of a 'despicable film' that 'works even better as vicarious cruelty against women', before suggesting that couples in the audience may wish to rethink their future together should one of them find the film remotely enjoyable (Ebert 2010).

This chapter explores those issues which incited such a negative response by analysing some of the films' themes in order to address the adaptation of key elements. I begin by focusing on the remakes' changes to storylines and the characterisation of their avenging protagonists, considering differences between not only originals and new versions, but also comparing the remakes themselves, and analysing the effect that these changes have on

the narratives' rape-revenge trajectories and their ultimate implications. The original films have been discussed in the context of controversies surrounding their release, their association with exploitation cinema and their alignment with the 'video nasties' furore in the UK in the early 1980s (see Barker 1984, Starr 1984, Kerekes and Slater 2000), and Craven's *Last House* often features in those studies of 1970s politically engaged cinema explored in the previous chapter (prominently so in Robin Wood's 1979 essay). While I do not wish to undermine the importance of understanding the films in these contexts (and, indeed, they offer useful points of comparison for considering the remakes' alignment with more recent controversial horror cycles), Carol J. Clover's (1992) and Barbara Creed's (1993) analyses of the original films remain the most useful in approaching their gender issues, and are used here as a framework for comparison with their remakes. The chapter then moves on to consider how Monroe and Iliadis' remakes should be positioned within their own genre contexts by looking at recent trends in contemporary horror cinema. Ultimately, I argue, updating the female protagonist and her actions in the rape-revenge remake enables the films' easy identification and classification as part of the genre, and the retributive theme of rape-revenge lends itself to the generic concerns of contemporary horror.

Gender, Class and Rape

Both remakes retain the central storylines of their originals. *I Spit on Your Grave* focuses on writer Jennifer Hills (Sarah Butler replaces Camille Keaton), who visits to a lakeside cabin to work on her latest novel. There, she encounters a group of local men who, under the pretext of 'deflowering' mentally challenged virgin Matthew (Chad Lindberg replaces Richard Pace), stalk, torment, and eventually subject Jennifer to a series of brutal rapes before leaving her for dead. Jennifer returns to exact her revenge upon the men, killing each of them in turn. In *The Last House on the Left*, Mari Collingwood (Sara Paxton replaces Sandra Cassell) and her friend Phyllis (Lucy Grantham)/Paige (Martha MacIsaac) are kidnapped by notorious escaped convict Krug Stillo (Garret Dillahunt replaces David Hess) and his gang. Phyllis/Paige is killed, and Mari

raped and shot. Circumstances lead the group to seek overnight refuge at a local house, unaware (at first) that it belongs to Mari's parents, who, upon discovering the fate of their daughter, seek their vengeance by killing Krug's posse.

While the remakes share the basic narratives of their 1970s counterparts, changes are apparent in the plots of both films. This is most notable in *Last House*, where Mari dies just as her parents find her in Craven's film, but survives and manages to get home in Iliadis's version; apparently altered by screenwriters to provide a suspenseful 'ticking clock' scenario where the Collingwoods' (Monica Potter & Tony Goldwyn) swift revenge is essential in order to get Mari to a hospital (Turek 2009a). A further significant change is in the character of Krug's son, who shifts from the troubled, deviant Junior (Mark Sheffler) of the original, to sympathetic Justin (Spencer Treat Clark) who, reluctant to be part of Krug's villainous family, both alerts the Collingwoods to the gang's identity, and colludes in the parents' revenge. Meanwhile, in *I Spit on Your Grave*, the addition of the local Sheriff (Andrew Howard) to the gang of rapists both changes the group dynamic and answers the question of why Jennifer exacts her own bloody revenge, rather than going to the police (Heller-Nicholas 2011: 177). These changes work alongside altered representations of both Mari and Jennifer's sexualities, and varying presentations of the social status of Hills, the Collingwoods, and the films' respective criminal gangs, to provide very different results with regards to the gender dynamics at work in these remakes, and it is these wider themes which this section explores.

In *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Carol J. Clover suggests that *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) is 'an almost crystalline example of the double-axis revenge plot so popular in modern horror: the revenge of the woman on her rapist, and the revenge of the city on the country' (Clover 1992: 115). Leaving aside the first point for now, it is worth considering how the films address city versus country polarities through their handling of class dynamics. The city, representative of civilisation and normality, pitched against the threatening, rural Other is a widely recognised trope in horror cinema (it is evident, for example, in

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre or *The Hills Have Eyes*, as well as their respective reboots). The relocation of action from the city to the country in horror cinema (and notably in rape-revenge films) is a trope which ‘rests squarely on what may be a universal archetype’, ascribing a folkloric, fairy tale quality to these films:

Consider Little Red Riding Hood, who strikes off into the wilderness only to be captured and eaten by a wolf (whom she foolishly trusts), though she is finally saved by a passing woodsman. Multiply and humanize the wolf, read “rape” for “eat”, skip the woodsman (let Red save herself), and you have *I Spit on Your Grave*. (Clover 1992: 124)

I Spit on Your Grave and *The Last House on the Left* represented a move in the 1970s from rape as a plot point to rape-revenge as a complete narrative, a shift from folkloric ‘motif’ to ‘tale-type’ (Clover 1992: 137). That rape-revenge can be interpreted as folklore is apparent, and Clover’s assertion that ‘horror movies look like nothing so much as folktales – a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what are in effect variants: sequels, remakes and rip-offs’ (Clover 1992: 10) would further suggest that the remakes should function in much the same way as the original films. And yet, while Iliadis’ *Last House* certainly magnifies the class tensions which feed into the city/country dichotomy, the blurring of this divide in the remake of *I Spit* arguably reduces the folkloric elements of Clover’s ‘double-axis’ plot.

Zarchi’s 1978 film amplifies the differences between educated, affluent and sophisticated Jennifer and her hillbilly rapists. “You’re from an evil place”, Matthew tells Jennifer upon their first meeting, after Hills rewards him for delivering her groceries with what she refers to as a “big tip from an evil New Yorker”. We are reminded of Jennifer’s city status through her internal monologue as she works on her book, and the assumptions that the men draw from this during the harrowing rape scenes, where Andy (Gunter Kleemann), mocking her unfinished manuscript as he tears up the pages, exclaims “New York broads sure fuck a lot”. Jennifer Hills 2010, meanwhile, might not speak with the heavy southern accent of her tormentors, but her city credentials are

only assumed, and never made explicit. Despite referral to her as a “stuck-up city bitch”, or a “big-city, cock-teasing whore”, Butler’s Jennifer never flaunts her perceived status in the slightly patronising way that Keaton’s did. There are no establishing shots here of Jennifer’s doorman seeing her on her way as she escapes Manhattan, as there are in the original film. She stops for petrol in a 4x4, and seems just as at home in practical jeans and a check shirt as the men do, rather than her 1978 counterpart’s dress and high heels, which signify her as a city dweller. Her initial banter with Johnny (Jeff Branson) is friendly, and there is no mention of where she has travelled from. Her biggest ‘crime’, then, does not seem to be that she is somehow seen to boast her ‘big-city’ superiority over the men, as Jennifer arguably does in the original film, but simply that she has the audacity not to find them attractive; she laughs at Johnny when he tries to seduce her, and unintentionally humiliates him in front of his friends as a result of this rejection. It is also worth noting that perhaps the most crudely drawn southern/country stereotype in the film is Earl (Tracey Walter), who happens to be the only amiable character that Jennifer encounters, and certainly the only male genuinely concerned for her welfare.

The men do, on occasion, take umbrage at what they perceive to be snobbishness on Hills’s part: before forcing her to drink liquor during her ordeal, Johnny asks her “you too good to have a drink with us? What are we to you, bunch of dirt?” However, as Kim Newman observes in his review for *Sight & Sound*, ‘she pointedly doesn’t express any negative attitude on class grounds, and even when she comes back for revenge belittles them not for their backgrounds but for their actions (which, in this context, makes her saintly)’ (Newman 2011). It is not my intention here to suggest that the city versus country opposition is not an issue in *I Spit* 2010, but rather that this axis is played out in the narrative through the men’s own insecurities rather than in Jennifer believing herself to be superior in any way, and that this is ultimately used as their excuse for attacking her. Clover discusses the rapes of the original as a sporting act which functions as a test of group dynamics and hierarchy, with Jennifer as mere playing field on which this game is carried out

(Clover 1992: 122).²³ This is certainly evident here, in Johnny's need to regain respect as ringleader of the gang after Hills humiliates him, and in the power struggle between Johnny and Sheriff Storch, who asserts his authority by delegating tasks during Jennifer's assault. But the rapes are also clearly the group's way of teaching the "stuck up city bitch" a lesson and an attempt to put her back in what they see to be "her place".²⁴ Thus, Clover's 'double axis' of city versus country and man (as rapist) versus woman function in the remake in ways which are intertwined.

Conversely, *The Last House on the Left* remake centralises the city/country divide through a more explicit class distinction between the Collingwoods and Krug's criminal family (as well as a spatial shift from city to country early in the film), and is simultaneously less concerned with the gender dynamic between men and women, focusing more on the power struggles between men. *I Spit* removes the clarity of class division in its remake by leaving Hills' origins unspecified, but *Last House* actually reverses this in additional opening scenes. While Craven's film opens innocuously enough on Mari's seventeenth birthday at the Collingwood's house in the country, a violent and bloody pre-credit sequence in the remake introduces Krug first, as he murders two police officers transporting him in a patrol car, escaping with the help of his girlfriend, Sadie (Riki Lindhome) and brother, Francis (Aaron Paul). Subsequent scenes establish the Collingwoods as city dwellers, highlighting their successful careers. John is an emergency room doctor, and although Emma's job is not specified, a phone call to a colleague as the family drive away from the city suggests that she is probably senior and certainly indispensable. Mari, meanwhile, is introduced as a champion swimmer, setting up her way of escape for later in the film. The eponymous house is revealed to be the family's second, summer home, and is substantially more grand than the 1972 Collingwoods' comparatively humble sole dwelling, complete with a boat

²³ Critic Joe Bob Briggs also observes this in his 2004 DVD commentary: 'These men look at rape as a recreational sport, proving their manhood to one another'.

²⁴ Interestingly, this clearly resounds with radical feminist Robin Morgan's statement that 'knowing our place is the message of rape – as it was for blacks the message of lynchings. Neither is an act of spontaneity or sexuality – they are both acts of political terrorism' (Morgan 1977, in Read 2000:96)

house and separate guest house (where Krug et al will eventually spend the night, after Sadie sarcastically asks “how many houses do you have?”). Money and status is something that both motivates the doctor, and provides grounds for his judgement. After complaining that his wife allowed her ‘deadbeat’ brother to stay at the summer home without his knowledge, he remarks of the thank-you present left by his brother-in-law, somewhat incredulously: “this is *four dollar* champagne”.

It could be expected that, in having Mari live after she is attacked, the remake could involve her more explicitly in the second half of the narrative, allowing her the scope to take her own revenge, perhaps alongside her parents. Yet this opportunity remains unrealised. After making her way back to the house, where she is found by her mother and father, Mari remains passive and speechless throughout the revenge section of the film, providing little but a causal reminder of her parents’ need to both avenge and escape. At this point, even her physical suffering becomes secondary to her parents’ emotional ordeal. Following a sequence in which John performs gruesome home surgery on Mari, cauterising her bullet wound and stabilising the pressure in her lungs by inserting a tube into her chest (during which his pained reactions to her discomfort are more apparent than her own responses), she is seen in little more than fleeting shots, while her parents agonise over their dilemma and the discovery that she has been raped (“we have to be prepared to do *anything*”, John tells Emma). Mari’s passivity contributes to a sense in the film’s final act that the violence has been ultimately reduced to little more than a climatic fight which aligns itself with a view of rape as a ‘property crime dispute between men’ (here, John and Krug) (Heller-Nicholas 2011: 93). Interestingly, given this, the remake omits Krug carving his name into Mari’s chest after he rapes her, thus labelling his ‘property’.

The Last House on the Left remake is similar to *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010) in their portrayals of Mari and Jennifer as somewhat less sexualised than their 1970s equivalents – both women are clearly identified as ‘girl-next-door’ types. This is most apparent in *I Spit* in the contrasting ways that Hills is

physically presented across the versions. Keaton spends much of the first act in a bikini, a dress, or apparently bra-less in a thin shirt, and is often heavily made up. Butler, meanwhile, is mostly seen in jeans, running gear, or pyjamas and minimal make up. The early, brief scene in which she sunbathes by the lake in a bikini was added, according to Monroe in his director's commentary, as a homage to similar shots of Keaton in Zarchi's original. In her first encounter with Matthew, who enquires whether she has a boyfriend, Keaton's Jennifer replies "I have many boyfriends". In *Last House*, the early scene in which Mari showers, the camera lingering on her skin in close up, is shortened. The remake also places far less emphasis on Mari's emergent sexuality. She and Paige briefly discuss boyfriends, but there is no equivalent scene to that in the original film where the teenagers discuss what it would be like to "make it" with their favourite band, Bloodlust (whose concert they are on the way to when they encounter Krug's gang), Mari comparing herself to changing Autumn leaves ("my breasts filled out...I feel like a woman for the first time in my life") while the song in the background portends the leaves turning, and 'gathering cherries off the ground'. Reminders of Mari's innocence are apparent in both incarnations of the character, however, her girlishness emphasised in her over-enthusiasm for ice cream (1972), and in the numerous signifiers of her childhood (a stuffed bear and a toddler's tricycle, for example) strewn around the summer home in the remake. Both of the remakes, while having to approach their female protagonists' sexuality differently due to their ages (Jennifer, although her age is never identified, is shown to be an independent woman, played by twenty-five year old Butler; Mari is clearly presented as a teenager on the verge of adulthood, and is still dependent on her parents), promote either the characters' innocence (Mari) or less overt sexuality (Jennifer) in a way which the 1970s films did not – perhaps aiming to strengthen their portrayal as sympathetic victims.

Another area in which the two remakes differ greatly from one another is in the adaptations of their rape scenes. The attacks on Hills are noticeably different across the two versions of *I Spit* – most obviously in the screen time

dedicated to the act of rape itself. While both of the films devote around twenty five minutes to these scenes, the original shows three separate, increasingly violent rapes which take up much of this time. The remake instead emphasises Jennifer's psychological assault and humiliation. Over a period of twenty minutes, Hills is forced to drink liquor, has lit matches thrown at her, and is made to perform fellatio on first a bottle and then a pistol ("if I don't like your enthusiasm, I may cum bad", Johnny warns her), before escaping, only to encounter Sheriff Storch. Initially believing him to be a potential saviour, a twist reveals him to in fact be the leader of her gang of tormentors and thus her ordeal begins anew as she is made to strip and dance for the group. The focus on Hills' bullying in the remake coincides with feminist discourses of rape as a display of man's violent power over women rather than as an explicitly sexual act; these men appear more angry than aroused.

The attacks are largely shot in a similar way to those in Zarchi's film in respect to the point of view which the audience is awarded. As with the original scenes, the initial intrusion is from Jennifer's perspective. The group enter her cabin as we watch from inside, just as helpless as she is; the viewer is not offered the opportunity to identify with her attackers as they conspire to break in. The camcorder footage Stanley (Daniel Franzese) shoots, witnessed by the audience first hand, positions the perspective briefly with the gang, but rather than 'encouraging viewer complicity' with the rapists, as the BBFC suggest in a press statement justifying the required cuts to the UK release (anon 2010), it instead acts self-reflexively, forcing the audience to question what they are seeing, while also highlighting Jennifer's discomfort by having her effectively address the camera. When the first rape occurs, we witness the events equally from both Matthew and Jennifer's points of view. By the second attack, association and empathy is solely with Jennifer. The shots directly from her perspective begin to blur, Johnny addressing the camera directly as Jennifer blacks out, in effect making the audience 'fade out' with her. Similarly, as the next scene begins, so the viewer is aligned with Hills, distorted snatches of the men's post-rape jeering vaguely heard as she comes to and the shot comes in

to focus. It would be difficult to argue that the scenes present rape in any way other than as a despicable, violent act, or that we are encouraged to identify with anyone other than the victim. While the remake does differ in its presentation of Jennifer's rape, then, it essentially works in the same way as the original, albeit with slicker production values and an emphasis on the threat of assault rather than the attack itself.

The Last House on the Left takes an altogether different approach in adapting the equivalent sequence of its original. Suspense is initially heightened by having Mari and Paige held captive in the back of Mari's car as Krug drives them out of town, which enables a hopeful near-miss as a police car passes them, an indication of what is to come as Francis and Sadie both molest the girls, and a tense escape attempt which results in the car crashing off-road. In Craven's film, however, the girls, packed into the boot of the car, remain unseen, as the camera stays with the gang in a scene typical of the film's often odd comedic tone (Sadie [Jeramie Rain] mocks "Frood" [Freud], confidently stating "It's a pa-hailus!", and Weasel [Fred Lincoln] muses "what do you think the sex crime of the century was?") The gang's joviality, and the soundtrack which juxtaposes a comical 'caper' kazoo with David Hess's unnerving lyrics ("Weasel and Junior, Sadie and Krug, out for the day with the Collingwood brood, out for the day for some fresh air and sun, let's have some fun with those two lovely children, then off them as soon as we're done"), rather than trivialising the forthcoming violence against the girls, serves to underline the way in which Krug and his gang view such acts with total indifference, as enjoyable parts of their everyday behaviour. While there is undoubtedly pleasure gained from their actions in the remake, kidnapping the girls is presented as a necessity. Krug, Francis and Sadie interrupt Justin, Paige and Mari smoking pot in the group's room, Justin's reaction to their return making it clear he never intended for the girls to encounter them. After discovering the gang's identity, the girls are told by Krug "I'm sorry ladies. We just can't risk it". Yet in 1972's *Last House*, the girls are lured in to the gang's room by Junior with the promise of marijuana after Sadie exclaims to the group: "I ain't putting out

anymore ‘till we get a couple more chicks round here...equal representation!”
The gang take the girls purely because they can, and want to.

While the previous scenes work to amplify a sense of threat less obvious in the original film, the remake then tones down the torment of the girls. The rape itself is filmed similarly to the original scene, with close ups of Mari’s hands grabbing at the grass, her facial expressions making her anguish clear. Yet earlier sections of this sequence are excluded from its adaptation. Missing is Mari attempting to convince Junior that his father is responsible for his control (Krug has him addicted to heroin) and that he has the power to change the situation. Here, Justin is the unwilling, pleading and powerless son who Krug attempts to get to ‘follow in his footsteps’, placing his hands on Mari’s breasts. Gone too are some of the humiliations forced upon the girls – there is no equivalent to demanding Phyllis urinate, to making her hit Mari before the pair are made to strip and kiss. Notably, the more explicit violence of the original is also toned down or removed entirely – although Paige is stabbed and killed, she is not disembowelled and does not have her hand amputated as in the case of Phyllis. While *I Spit on your Grave* stresses Jennifer’s mental torment and degradation during her attack, these elements are given less attention in the remake of *Last House*, and much of the suffering inflicted upon Mari is seen through Justin’s reactions to what he is reluctantly observing, just as her later pain is apparent through her father. I disagree with the suggestion that shortening the rapes themselves in *I Spit* (or removing some of the violence and degradation in *Last House*) leads to a missing sense of ‘ethical symmetry’ or ‘equilibrium’ between the rape and revenge sections of the film (Heller-Nicholas 2009: 178), but there is an argument that the increased anguish of Jennifer and the reduced torment of Mari could affect sympathetic identifications with the avengers of the second acts of the remakes. It is these revenge sections of the films that this chapter will now consider.

Revenge, Role Reversal and the 'Monstrous' Feminine

In her study *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Barbara Creed discusses 1978 Jennifer Hills as being representative of the 'all-powerful, all-destructive, deadly femme castratrice' (Creed 1993: 129). In her dual roles of both symbolically castrated (through the act of rape) and literal castrator (with the emphasis ultimately on the latter), Jennifer's revenge is shown to be justifiable and her actions sympathetic. Yet, Creed argues, the film remains misogynistic in spirit, mainly due to the eroticised depiction of male torture, and its resulting association of death with masochistic pleasure (Creed 1993: 130). Matthew is enticed into the woods by Hills, who bares her body with a promise that she could have given him "a summer to remember for the rest of your life", then encourages him to penetrate her before she tightens a noose around his neck at the very moment of his ejaculation. After having Johnny literally stare down the barrel of her gun, she chooses not to shoot him, instead taking him back to the cabin. She masturbates him in the bath before severing his penis, his initial reaction being to mistake pain for intense pleasure before he looks down to see his arterial blood spurt. While the need to first seduce her rapists in order to then kill them could be understood as some kind of feminist statement, perhaps the use of her body and sexuality as her ultimate weapons, the way in which Jennifer lures her rapists to their eventual deaths is decisively problematic; not so much in the use of seduction to entrap her tormentors-turned-victims, but in the fact that (and particularly in Matthew's case) she actually follows through with the sexual acts offered as allurements. Conversely, 2010 Jennifer's method for capturing her attackers involves no enticement, no luring them with nudity or the promise of a "nice, hot bath". Instead, they are caught in bear traps or knocked out with a baseball bat; the one exception being to expose her behind to Johnny anonymously in order to get him close enough to hit him over the head with a crowbar.

Monroe has stated that the seductive techniques employed by Jennifer during her revenge were removed to encourage empathy, and to promote realism and a sense of 'social responsibility' (Decker, 2010). Given the

unlikelihood of Mari's parents as avengers seducing her attackers, it is unsurprising that *Last House* had previously presented a similarly more realistic approach by removing the scene in which Estelle Collingwood (Cynthia Carr) severs Weasel's penis with her teeth under the pretence of fellating him. The seduction does, however, remain in the remake, albeit to a lesser extent. Shortly after the Collingwoods have discovered that the family taking shelter in their guest house are responsible for the assault on their daughter, Francis appears, claiming difficulty sleeping, and flirts with Emma, who is alone in the kitchen. Somewhat hesitantly, Emma responds and flirts back. Yet she does this with far less confidence and determination than Estelle displays in the 1972 film, and the result is that, as with Krug in the kidnapping scene, characters are seen to be undertaking the actions of their original counterparts out of necessity. It is difficult in this instance to establish, however, exactly what this necessity is, and from where it arises. There are opportunities for Emma to attack Francis well before she hits him with the wine bottle she retrieves from the kitchen in order to "pour us a drink", and close ups of her eyeline show her sizing up knives and contemplating ways to attack him throughout this sequence. Ultimately, the seduction achieves nothing except to delay time, and the sequence concludes with Francis being hit, and then stabbed by Emma, before John appears and the Collingwoods kill him together, firstly by attempting to drown him in the sink, then forcing his hand into the waste disposal unit, before John delivers a fatal pickaxe blow to his head. There is a sense that, rather than seduction being a requirement for Emma's revenge on Francis, that this sequence was included purely as a way of acknowledging Estelle's seduction of Weasel in Craven's film.

For Creed, in *I Spit on Your Grave*, 'woman-as-victim is represented as an abject thing, [while] man-as-victim is not similarly degraded and humiliated' (Creed 1993: 130). The remake addresses this, primarily by turning each of the attackers' own perversions back on them during Jennifer's revenge. Thus, self-confessed "ass-man" Storch is anally raped with a loaded shotgun in a mirrored attack which follows Jennifer's subjection to a similar violation at the hands of

the Sheriff. Voyeur Stanley, who filmed Jennifer's assault, has his eyelids pried open with fishing hooks and his eyeballs smeared with fish guts before they are pecked out by a murder of CGI crows while his own camera records his torture; and Andy gets his face dunked in a lye bath as a consequence of his near-drowning Jennifer in a dirty puddle. Johnny, who reduced Hills to animal status during her ordeal, labelling her a show horse and commanding she show him her teeth, is referred to as an "ornery stallion" and has his own teeth pulled with pliers before she produces a pair of shears, taunting "you know what they do to horses that can't be tamed, Johnny? They geld them". Creed discusses the significance of pulling teeth in Freudian dream analysis, concluding that the meaning of such an act, if the tooth was understood to represent the penis, could be interpreted threefold: as an act of castration, intercourse or masturbation (Creed 1993: 117-119). This association of castration with sexual gratification again signifies a kind of symbolic masochistic pleasure, an element of the original film which, as stated earlier, can lead to its interpretation as a misogynistic text (as with the castration scene between Estelle and Weasel in Craven's *Last House*). Despite this connection, I would suggest that the literal pulling of Johnny's teeth in the remake prior to his actual castration, and the methods Jennifer uses to capture him (violence as opposed to seduction) only serve to further distance Butler's Hills and her vengeance from Keaton's siren and the eroticism of the original's equivalent scene.

Even Matthew's death, via an unwittingly self-inflicted shotgun blast through Storch's body, is reflective of his reluctant complicity in the attacks. Initially refusing to take part in Jennifer's humiliation, vulnerable Matthew only rapes Jennifer after bullying from the other men and Johnny's threat to "get your clothes off, Matthew, or I'll slice her from chin to cunt". His attack on Hills is a direct attempt to save both Jennifer from this fate and himself from a potential beating from Johnny and exclusion from the group. And yet, as we have clearly established that Matthew both knows the act to be wrong (he verbally defends Hills, refuses to participate in her assault until Johnny's warning, vomits immediately afterward in disgust, and subsequently suffers flashbacks of the

attacks) and ultimately – physically, at least – enjoys it regardless of this fact (he orgasms), he must suffer the consequences of his involvement. As Jennifer states in response to his apologies, before tightening a noose round his neck: “it’s just not good enough”. Matthew wakes to find himself tied to a chair, a string looped round his wrist (in place of the rubber bands he nervously plays with throughout the first half of the film) leading to the trigger of the shotgun buried inside Storch but pointing in his direction. Despite Storch’s warning, Matthew moves to free his arms, killing both himself and the Sheriff, his death explicitly linked to another person in much the same way as his place as Jennifer’s rapist was influenced by other members of the gang.

Clover suggests that we may choose to interpret the ways in which Jennifer 1978 dispatches her attackers as ‘symbolic rapes, the closest a penis-less person can get to the real thing’, but argues that ‘the film itself draws the equation only vaguely, if at all [...] it is an available meaning, but the fact that it is not particularly exploited suggests that it is not particularly central’ (Clover 1992: 161). The brutal acts of torture in the remake can in contrast be understood as explicitly symbolic rapes which mirror Jennifer’s own violations. The restraints that each of the men find themselves in (absent from the original) reflect how Hills was pinned down by the men as they took turns raping her. The intrusions on the male body – Storch’s shotgun rape, Stanley’s eyes being pecked out, and Johnny being forced to perform fellatio on a pistol before his teeth are wrenched out and his severed penis is stuffed into his mouth – are in direct response to Jennifer’s forced anal, vaginal and oral penetrations. The language she uses either explicitly quotes her rapists jeers of “no teeth, show horse”, “deep, deep, deep” and “suck it, bitch”, or otherwise highlight how she has turned the tables in ways they could not have imagined possible: “now it’s my turn to fuck you”. This gender role reversal is furthered by the men begging, crying and screaming during their torture, displays of abject terror which are traditionally gendered feminine (Clover 1992: 51). Thus they are reduced to shows of female traits, a further humiliation which enhances their symbolic castrations. Johnny does respond to pain – “even your boys didn’t piss

themselves”, Jennifer taunts in response to his reaction to having his teeth pulled. But as the only member of the gang who refuses to cave in and plead, instead laughing maniacally and yelling “fuck you” at Hills through a mouthful of blood, he must be literally (as opposed to symbolically) castrated as the ultimate punishment for his actions.

Although the Collingwoods’ revenge is brutal and bloody, clearly showing attacks on both the male body (Francis is stabbed and mutilated before he is killed with an axe, Krug is beaten in a lengthy fight with John, hit with a fire extinguisher, and is eventually paralysed and has his head microwaved) and the female (Emma shoots Sadie through the eye), *The Last House on the Left* employs no similar tactic to that of the mirrored attacks in *I Spit on Your Grave* in order to symbolically reflect the rape of its first half. This in itself is not problematic, but coupled with the adaptive decision to have Mari survive, raises the question of why her parents become so set on revenge, to the point where they seemingly place their desire for vengeance above the established, urgent need to get their daughter to a hospital (Heller-Nicholas 2011:90). Their first attack, on Francis, arises from his interruption as they frantically search for the keys to their boat, their only method of escape. Yet, after this initial assault, the Collingwoods choose to enter the guesthouse where the rest of the gang are sleeping, with the clear intention of killing them, rather than continue to search for the keys. John even *returns* to the house after the family’s escape to paralyse Krug and blow his head up in a microwave. The pleasure which the pair at times seem to garner from inflicting pain upon Krug’s gang, rather than promoting the ‘violence begets violence’ message of the 1972 film, ultimately only serves to undermine it.

Craven’s film highlights the futility of revenge. It ends on a freeze frame of a distraught Estelle and John (Gaylord St James), the doctor blood-soaked and still holding the chainsaw he has just used to dispatch Krug in front of a police officer. The denial of any satisfactory closure (where we might see the Collingwoods adjust after their vengeful rampage, or take some comfort in the deaths of their daughter’s killers) shows that any assumption of good triumphing

over evil is naïve, and that revenge can only ever be 'rewarded with chaos and despair' (Heller-Nicholas 2011:38). Having the parents commit violent, murderous acts so similar to those previously carried out by their victims blurs the distinctions between good and evil/right and wrong in a way which shrouds the conclusion in a sense of moral ambiguity, and the audience are left to their own decisions regarding the ethical issues surrounding vengeance and retributive violence (a theme furthered in Craven's later film *The Hills Have Eyes*). Yet this is something denied by the remake, where the narrative is provided both a happy ending and identification of the Collingwoods as 'good guys', their violence postured as strictly necessary for means of escape (although, as previously discussed, this is often not the case). Even the tagline used on both UK and US posters promoting the film, while asking the film's potential viewers to consider their own ethical positions, differentiates the Collingwoods from the 'bad' gang in question: "If bad people hurt someone you love, how far would you go to hurt them back?"

John and Emma, rather than being damaged and traumatised by their actions at the film's conclusion, are instead seen calmly sailing their boat away from the scene of carnage at the house, leaving their violent acts behind them. Vengeance has not ripped them apart – rather, their family is more complete as a result of their punishing Krug's family. In the original film, Junior is a heroin addict whose troubled behaviour is encouraged by both his habit and his father (who has him hooked on the drug as a method of controlling him), the pair's tumultuous relationship culminates in Krug instructing his son to "blow your brains out", which he does with only minor hesitation. In opposition, Justin is presented as a reluctant and unwilling bystander to the gang's misdemeanours, a boy of similar age to Mari's late brother, Ben, who is effectively 'rescued' from his criminal family by the Collingwoods, and seemingly adopted, completing their tight-knit, nuclear family. By earlier refusing to participate in his father's rape of Mari, he is, unlike *I Spit's* Matthew (who resists, but is ultimately forced to collude), spared punishment. Junior's death contributes to the hopelessness of violence in Craven's film. Justin, as a 'good boy', is not only entitled to live,

but to take Ben's place alongside Mari in the Collingwood family as they sail away from violence into the sunrise. The changes to the film's bleak conclusion were added, according to screenwriter Carl Ellsworth, in order to engage audiences invested in the Collingwoods: 'This movie doesn't have a happy ending, but there is some hope. I couldn't be happier that, in the end, this is a good versus evil movie' (in Turek 2009a). The final scene is a sequence in which Krug wakes up, presumably the next morning, to find John standing over him, coldly explaining he has paralysed him by making cuts in his body at strategic points to impede his nervous system, before placing his head in a microwave and switching it on. That the very last shot of the film features, not the broken Collingwoods as per 1972's *Last House*, but Krug's exploded, smoking head, serves as a reminder of the gang's punishment and a 'satisfactory' pay-off, further distancing the remake from the sense of the hopelessness of violence that permeates Craven's film.

If the fates of the rapists in *I Spit on Your Grave* result in them being demasculinised, then Jennifer as their torturer surely runs the risk of becoming phallicised, not just the ultimate 'Final Girl', but a near monster who stalks, captures and tortures her prey with practically superhuman strength and prowess. Indeed, one of the issues critics seem to hold with the remake is this shift in Jennifer's personality between the rape and revenge halves of the narrative, and the resulting potential loss of sympathy toward her character. Yet this seems an illogical complaint, not least because these two sides of Jennifer represent her as victim and victor, captive and captor, raped and symbolic rapist: dichotomous roles which would obviously see her adopt different traits. Furthermore, Jennifer's strength and determination, her will to fight, her intelligence and physical fitness have already been made apparent throughout the first half of the film. What could be a problematic portrayal of Jennifer as unsympathetic avenger is further balanced with glimpses of the woman she was prior to her ordeal, in the fleeting expressions of hesitance, sadness and disgust on her face as she conducts her revenge. Storch begs Jennifer to release his young daughter (the ironically named Chastity), taken temporarily by Hills as

bait, with the plea “she’s just an innocent girl”. “So was I”, Jennifer responds sombrely. Bitter reminders throughout the torture scenes of the men’s nature keep sympathy firmly on Jennifer’s side, and her actions justified; Storch’s last words to her are “I’ll rape you in hell; you’re just a piece of meat. I’ll find you, I’ll hunt you down in hell, you bitch!”

Although Hills is represented as a sympathetic character throughout her revenge, there is no doubt that her acts, and the determination with which she carries them out, are indeed monstrous. This is enhanced by her physical absence during a twenty minute mid-section which divides the rape and revenge halves of the narrative. We do not see Jennifer’s slow recovery and her pre-emptive praying to God for forgiveness as we do in Zarchi’s film, although similar scenes were initially shot (and seen in early trailers). Instead, the focus is on the rapists, their group dynamic collapsing and paranoia growing as Jennifer, unseen and anonymous, begins to stalk them over the course of a month; stealing Stanley’s home video of the attacks and sending it to Storch’s wife, and dropping dead birds on Johnny’s doorstep (a motif repeated from her own protracted torture earlier in the film). Again, rather than allowing the audience to identify or sympathize with the men during these sequences, with the possible exception of Matthew, we are instead reminded of their earlier acts. Johnny tries out his pick-up lines on another potential victim. Andy voices disbelief at Matthew’s remorse, telling the group “I think he even feels guilty”. And Storch, in an attempt to tie up “loose ends”, shoots Earl, a man he has known since childhood, at point blank range.



Figure 15: 'Monstrous' femininity in *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Last House on the Left*

There is no question of whom the audience is expected to side with in either of the remakes. In both instances, the rapists (and those associated with them) are clearly presented as the 'bad guys' (literally, in the case of *Last House*'s promotion), while Jennifer and Mari are presented sympathetically, and, however successfully, Iliadis' film strives to show John and Mary Collingwood as doing the 'right' or, at least, the 'necessary' thing. Yet there are moments in both films where the avengers are made to appear somewhat monstrous – the twisted pleasure afforded Dr. Collingwood as he calmly positions Krug's head in the microwave, Jennifer's invisible, almost supernatural, stalking of the men and her sudden, silent return. Even Mari, as she makes her way home in the rain after her attack, bloodied and dirty, is shot as a 'vacant monster' (Heller-Nicholas 2011:93) (see Figure 15). Yet, rather than striving to suggest that the initial victims or avengers are entirely monstrous, I would argue that these moments, alongside the brutal violence (especially in the revenge sequences), contribute towards a positioning of the films as belonging firmly within the horror genre. Understanding the remakes as adaptations, and comparatively analysing them in this context alongside Craven's and Zarchi's original films, is undoubtedly important in addressing their key themes. But in order to establish how the films function within their own genre context, and indeed to appreciate the necessity of the changes made, the new versions should also be considered alongside recent trends in contemporary horror cinema.

Contemporary Genre Trends, Torture Porn and Retribution

Categorising rape-revenge as a sub-genre of horror is problematic, not least due to its parallels with other genres such as the Western, the absence of a clearly defined and unsympathetic monster, and the fact that other revenge dramas are not usually considered within the realms of horror cinema (Read 2000: 25-27). Instead, rape-revenge should be understood as a 'narrative structure which has been mapped over other genres' (Read 2000: 25). Arguably then, by this understanding, Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* and Craven's *The Last House on the Left* are not easily defined as horror films, and certainly not

when judged by more recent genre conventions. The target audience for the remakes, meanwhile, is not comprised primarily by fans of 1970s exploitation cinema - with the notable exception of those curious about the adaptation process. Rather, they are made for a new, young horror audience expecting *Hostel*-esque gruesomeness, and it is to these potential viewers that the films must ultimately appeal. The early buzz and subsequent marketing did, to some extent, rely on the notoriety of the originals, a strategy frequently used when promoting horror remakes. This is most obvious in the posters and DVD covers which practically replicate the originals' promotional imagery, especially for Monroe's film, an unmistakable reference to the infamous, somewhat sexualized shot of Hills from behind, dirty and wounded, her white underwear and shirt (seen in neither version) torn, carrying a bloody knife (a weapon which Jennifer never actually brandishes during the remake). Meir Zarchi's approval of the *I Spit* remake has also been promoted; he retains an executive producer credit and is included in DVD extras discussing the new version as a stand-alone entity, and as a huge compliment and tribute to his original. Wes Craven, meanwhile, initiated the *Last House* remake, acting as Producer for Rogue Pictures, and championed Iliadis as director in interviews. Yet the films are clearly not simply promoted as respectful retellings of original exploitation classics.

Early reports in the trade press of production company CineTel acquiring the rights to the screenplay for *I Spit on Your Grave* suggested that 'contemporary genre fare has become so graphically violent that the original doesn't seem as outrageous as it did 30 years ago', and claimed that the producers were looking at ways to 'ratchet up the shock factor' (Fleming 2008). CineTel President Paul Hertzberg told *Variety*: 'After seeing what was done with an R rating on films like "Saw" and "Hostel", we think we can modernise this story, be competitive with what this marketplace expects and not have to aim for an NC-17 or X rating' (in Fleming 2008). In acknowledging these films as inspiration for *I Spit on Your Grave*'s adaptation, and by expressing their intention to intensify the 'shock factor', the remake's producers explicitly aligned

the film with a cycle of successful, graphically violent horror that had become popular in the mid-2000s.

Hostel and *Saw* were included - alongside *The Devils Rejects*, *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005) and others - in a 2006 New York magazine article by critic David Edelstein to express his personal concerns over a new wave of explicitly violent horror films which he dubbed 'torture porn'. Edelstein identified these as predominantly mainstream horror films which featured extreme gore and bloodshed, usually within ultraviolent scenes of protracted torture, typically inflicted upon 'decent people with recognizable human emotions', and which presented an arguably more ambiguous sense of morality than their generic predecessors (Edelstein 2006). Edelstein's torture porn label became the established term for the more visceral horror cinema of the last decade, although it has attracted criticism from horror fans, critics, and academics alike. Adam Lowenstein goes so far as to argue that 'torture porn does not exist', suggesting that the term 'spectacle horror' is a more appropriate working definition for 'the staging of spectacularly explicit horror for purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventure as much as shock or terror, but without necessarily breaking ties with narrative development or historical allegory' (Lowenstein 2011: 43).²⁵ The popularity of the torture porn/spectacle horror film remained evident throughout the latter part of the decade with a *Hostel* sequel (followed by a third film, released direct to video [Scott Spiegel, 2011]), and six further, successful instalments of the *Saw* franchise between 2005 and 2010 (as well as a theme park ride and two video game releases). These aside, however, it would be difficult to locate many later texts featuring spectacle horror tropes among mainstream genre cinema (where, according to Edelstein, torture porn belongs), or to suggest that films lumbered with the description feature many connections other than their visual

²⁵ It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to consider the wealth of academic writing on torture porn, but studies of the cycle remain prevalent as the trend continues. In addition to Lowenstein, see also for example Lockwood (2009), Sharrett (2009), Morris (2010) and Jones (2010, 2012, 2013). A number of essays on other areas of modern genre cinema also make reference to the influence of torture porn (most notably its aesthetics) – see for example Craig Frost's (2009) analysis of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, and Johnny Walker's (2011) discussion of contemporary British horror cinema.

extremities. Critical failures such as *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007) and *The Tortured* (Robert Lieberman, 2010) are difficult to place alongside controversial foreign fare like *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* (Tom Six, 2009), *Srpski film/A Serbian Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), or French extreme horror films such as *Martyrs*, *Frontières/Frontiers* or *À l'intérieur/Inside* (Alexandre Bustillo & Julien Maury, 2007), and yet are often discussed almost interchangeably as part of a torture porn 'cycle', despite their varying themes. Similarly, while I would argue that *I Spit* and *Last House* are evident of a particular aesthetic that connects them to the trend, Monroe's film in particular is difficult to locate as belonging to the 'mainstream' required of Edelstein's rather specific definition, having had only a very limited theatrical release before being its arrival on DVD.

As discussed in chapter 6, the torture porn label often insinuates a particular meaning, and a number of the films connected to the cycle have been considered within the context of ethical debates surrounding American retaliation and torture in the wake of 9/11 and the War on Terror. Similar suggestions have been made of *I Spit on Your Grave*. Kevin J. Wetmore argues that 'all of the images in the film are lifted directly (if, perhaps presented more extremely) from Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. Naked men, suspension in chains, waterboarding, stress positions, beatings, chokings, all designed to humiliate and cause pain are present' (Wetmore 2012: 113). Furthermore, Wetmore suggests that in showing Jennifer's attacks as responses to her own assault, the torture is defensible: 'Torture, humiliation and terror are justified if one is using them in response to the same. Like the end of both *Hostel* films, it is acceptable for an American to do this to those who did this to Americans' (Wetmore 2012: 113). The interpretation of Andy's punishment as explicitly representing waterboarding, and the men's restraints as holding them in stress positions, along with Wetmore's observation that Hills's jeans and vest are 'clothing more suggestive of the military than suggestive of being suggestive' (Wetmore 2012: 112), clearly aligns Jennifer with the American forces and her rapists as camp prisoners. Yet this interpretation of meaning is highly

problematic – in *I Spit on Your Grave* and potentially for rape revenge films more broadly – not least because it risks ignoring the important central issues of gender, sex and rape in the film. The suggestion that the film is concerned with allegories of American vengeance bypasses the obvious point that the men are also, in fact American (and that their ‘otherness’ is identified predominantly through their gender, rather than their geographical origins, as discussed earlier in this chapter). The tortures inflicted upon the men are highly personal punishments for their respective parts in Hills’s assault; both series of attacks are difficult to see as metaphorical representations of terrorism or subsequent American retaliation.

The mirrored suffering of the rape and revenge sections of the narrative of *I Spit* aims to validate both Jennifer’s actions and her new-found, ‘monstrous’ personality; her rape and humiliation serve as retributivist justification for both the punishments she inflicts and her change in demeanour. As Jeremy Morris says of victims-turned-torturers in films, ‘such role reversals are one technique that encourages the audience to “be on the side of” the torturer’ (Morris 2010: 45). Justification for Hills’s revenge is further strengthened through the use of ‘equal-punishment retributivism’ (Morris 2010: 46), in those inventive tortures which reflect her own suffering. It is worth noting here that, in keeping with the idea of ‘suitable’ reverse punishment, Jennifer, while obviously being responsible for their deaths, does not actually kill any of the men. They are left to bleed (Johnny, Stanley) or burn (Andy, in acid) to death, or their fates are put in each other’s hands (Storch and Matthew). Hills is not present, just as the audience is not made privy to their last breaths (again, aligning identification with her). We hear the men scream, see them struggle and suffer, but then cut to see their lifeless faces, post-death. Jennifer leaves them for dead in much the same way as the men did her after she jumped from a bridge to escape them – and they intended her death just as she then sets up theirs. The ethical questions surrounding retributive violence are problematised in *Last House*, missing *I Spit*’s mirrored, reflective acts of revenge, killing rather than initiating the means to an end, and denying Mari the opportunity to undertake her own

vengeance. Her parents are not the grieving Collingwoods of Craven's film, desperately seeking solace in their acts. Instead, they are supposedly fighting to get their living daughter to safety. Yet, rather than trapping Krug's gang, or maiming them where essential to their escape, eventually the only satisfaction the parents find is in the death of their daughter's attackers.

Denis Iliadis insisted in interviews previewing *The Last House on the Left* that the intention of all involved in the adaptive process was to actively avoid the film becoming torture porn:

...by having the daughter fighting to survive, it wasn't just about revenge. These parents are trying to protect their baby and they would do anything to keep her alive. It's a much more valid notion. There's this tendency now to go torture porn and all of that. I didn't like the idea of the parents devising torture tactics. It had to be this urgency. Our daughter is here, we have to keep her alive and no one is going to get in our way. (Turek 2009b)

The key defining factor of torture porn, according to Iliadis here, is the advance planning of torture as revenge, devising torment as punishment. *Last House* is, by the director's definition, not torture porn because the Collingwoods do not, like Jennifer Hills, or the Elite Hunting Club (*Hostel*), or Jigsaw (*Saw*), calculate and prepare their revenge tactics. Rather, there is again the suggestion of urgency and necessity. Yet, as previously discussed, this claim is largely inaccurate. While *Last House* may not feature the carefully devised traps which Jennifer concocts in *I Spit*, John and Emma's attacks on Francis and Krug are most certainly torturous – and those on Krug and Sadie avoidable. Furthermore, the microwave scene very clearly demonstrates not only John's pleasure in revenge, but also a great deal of forethought. Returning to the house after the family's escape, using his medical skills to paralyse Krug, and positioning him inside the microwave, is not evidence of an urgent need to overpower him. Steven Monroe (in Decker 2010) highlights the absurdity of this scene in his observation that 'it didn't feel like it was part of the same movie', that it seemed like something added as an afterthought, suggesting that *Last House* may

actually have been striving to align itself with evident trends in horror at the time to further appeal to its potential audience.



Figure 16: 'Torture porn' imagery in *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave*

Torture porn is perhaps best understood here at the most basic level through Lowenstein's spectacle horror model – its most obvious and undeniable tropes being the visual presentation of suffering and explicit violence. While Jennifer's drawn out torment at the hands of her rapists is evident of these trends, the revenge half of *I Spit on Your Grave* pushes them, with cleverly designed traps and restraints, painful and ultimately explicitly gory tests of physical endurance, and that eye-for-an-eye retributive logic that would not be out of place in a rurally set *Saw*. The association with a torture porn aesthetic is also apparent in the teaser poster – Jennifer brandishing her bloody shears, with the emphasis on her weapon, above the threatening tagline 'it's date night' (a line she actually turns on Johnny) (see Figure 17). While not so apparent in its promotion, *Last House* also features further torture porn tropes – the microwave, the sequences of home surgery, shot in close up and with an emphasis on the pain caused (both in the scene where Mari's father tries to save her, and an earlier sequence where John resets Francis's broken nose), and the slow-motion shot of a bullet ripping through Sadie's eye. This emphasis on suffering and gore is something more apparent in modern horror cinema more widely (including in other remakes, for example in *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), and as discussed, it leads to the critical alignment of very different films being encompassed under an umbrella definition of torture porn.



Figure 17: Torture porn aesthetic in promotional materials

In addition to the remakes' torture porn imagery, *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Last House on the Left* also employ other motifs from horror cinema more widely. From early in *I Spit*, the use of jump-shocks, POV shots of Jennifer stalked unknowingly through Stanley's camera, and an added intense score all aim to increase the suspense and to explicitly code the film as belonging to the contemporary horror genre. *Last House*, similarly, begins with a tracking shot through the woods akin to something visible in the stalker cycle, followed by a jump scare as the police car carrying Krug is hit suddenly by Francis's truck. Much of the action takes place at night, during heavy rain and thunder, and features 'suspenseful hide-and-seek vignettes' (Heller-Nicholas 2011:92). Both remakes also reduce elements of dark humour from the originals, most obviously by completely changing the odd comedic tone of the first half of *Last House*, and cutting characters such as the incompetent, bumbling police officers investigating Mari's disappearance and a woman in a truck full of chickens who picks them up after their patrol car breaks down. In *I Spit*, the problematic, cartoonish portrayal of "retarded" Matthew is rejected in favour of a more credible and sensitive performance by Chad Lindberg. It is clear that both remakes, at a time when wider cinematic trends embraced exploitation tropes in films such as, for example, *The Devils Rejects*, *Grindhouse* (Quentin Tarantino/Robert Rodriguez, 2007), *Machete* (Ethan Maniquis/Robert

Rodriguez, 2010), *Black Dynamite* (Scott Sanders, 2009), and *Hobo With a Shotgun* (Jason Eisener, 2011), to some extent reject their roots and instead strive for association with more mainstream, and identifiably horror, cinema. While, with its extremely limited cinematic release, *I Spit on Your Grave* can be considered a more marginal, perhaps cultish example, *The Last House on the Left* in particular clearly aimed for success among horror fans at the cinema, yet performed 'below par' at the box office (Gray 2009) (grossing approximately \$32 million [boxofficemojo.com]); the film, while promoting its parental revenge angle as something more akin to family drama, 'had the appearance of just another gruesome horror movie' (Gray 2009).

Conclusion

The decision to keep Mari alive in Iliadis's film is perhaps as indicative of women's centrality in horror cinema as much as it is the suspenseful 'ticking clock' addition that the film's writer claims. An increasingly female horror audience, as evidenced by *Last House*'s exit polls with women making up close to 60% of the viewing figures (Gray 2009) (see also Macnab 2004), desires tougher, more sympathetic and more realistic female protagonists. The decision to replace (popular) central male characters in horror remakes, for example in *The Thing* and *Evil Dead*, sits alongside the stronger representations of women in new versions of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Hitcher* and *Toolbox Murders* (among others) as an indication of this shift. Changes in representations of rape are also evidenced by remakes other than *I Spit* and *Last House*. Adaptations either address problematic ambiguity surrounding consent (*Straw Dogs*, Rod Lurie, 2011)²⁶, reduce the level of assault seen (*Mother's Day*, Darren Lynn Bousman, 2010) or remove rape scenes entirely where they were felt to be superfluous (*Silent Night*).

²⁶ While occasionally aligned with the rape-revenge cycle, the original *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) plays out as more of a siege movie, and while the tension between Charlie (Del Henney) and Amy (Susan George) after he rapes her plays a key part in the film's narrative, it is not central to the plot. Furthermore, the film's protagonist (Dustin Hoffman) is unaware of his wife's rape and is thus not seeking revenge for the act. Lurie's remake is similar in this regard, and for this reason I do not consider it a 'rape-revenge remake' and have chosen not to include discussion of the film here. Expectedly, however, the film also exaggerates its horror elements – it is bloodier and emphasizes shock – in order to align itself with contemporary trends.

Paxton's Mari is clearly set up as the final girl which Cassell's did not represent. Her sexual desires remain unspoken, she has turned her back on past drug use (although eventually acquiesces), and remains resourceful throughout her kidnapping – deliberately misleading Krug so she is closer to home (Heller-Nicholas 2011:93). Yet, although she is 'rewarded' by survival, thus disavowing the behaviour of her original counterpart, she is not provided the opportunity to undertake her own revenge. Parental revenge for the rape of a child is seen elsewhere in recent films like *The Horseman* (Steven Kastrissios, 2008), *Les 7 Jours du Talion/7 Days* (Daniel Grou, 2010) and *The Tortured*, yet in these instances the parents are also avenging their child's death. Mari's dependency on her parents is only accentuated by her survival, providing as close to a 'happy ending' as possible for a film with a story of this nature, yet denying her status as a strong female lead through her total passivity throughout the second half of the film.

While any potential feminist message in *I Spit on Your Grave* 2010 is arguably confused by the representation of its protagonist as a monster (albeit a sympathetic one), I would suggest that this is as a result of the need and deliberate attempt to position the film clearly within a particular contemporary genre context, and to market it as such. Furthermore, and despite the near demonising of Jennifer, it could be maintained that Monroe's film not only interprets the perceived feminist agenda of Zarchi's original, but actively enhances this theme – Butler's Hills does not exploit her sexuality as a precursor to vengeance in the way in which Keaton's Jennifer does. She battles until the final frame just as the heroines of so-called 'survivalist' horrors *Haute Tension*, *The Descent* (Neil Marshall, 2005), or *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008), but unlike these women is neither recaptured (*Eden Lake*) nor revealed to be delusional (*Haute Tension*, *The Descent*) in a last minute twist. Here is a strong, smart and determined female protagonist who not only survives, but returns to avenge her own violations, and although there is no suggestion of a 'happy ending' for Hills after justice is supposedly served, she is seen in the

final shot of the film having lost neither her mind nor her life, but instead calmly reflecting on her actions.

Both films need to be understood within the context of their status as remakes, and thus take the rape-revenge storylines and map them over the new versions. Yet the films can be seen to reflect (*Last House*), or even comparatively progress (*I Spit*) elements of other, recent films with which they may be thematically grouped, both reflecting on a more female-centred horror cinema, and attempting to (however successfully) provide for the associated expectations of its audience. Ultimately, however, it is their generic concerns which are most apparent in their adaptations, and it is to the conventions of contemporary horror cinema which they must conform. Changes are undoubtedly made to a film when addressing the shifting cultural climate in which it is produced, but that *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave* both so clearly aim to align with horror trends suggests that their politics are a consideration secondary to their genre conventions, and that, as with those remakes considered in the previous chapter, it is appealing to modern audiences that remains the most prevalent consideration in adaptation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In 2013, two mainstream remakes of significant horror titles received wide theatrical releases, to different degrees of success. On a surface level, *Evil Dead* and *Carrie* garnered fairly similar revenues at the box office – worldwide totals of \$97.5m and \$84.8m respectively – but closer analysis reveals a disparity between the films' earnings. Although released on a comparable number of domestic screens (3025/3127), box office figures for their opening weekends were significantly different. *Evil Dead* took \$25.8m and opened in first place, while *Carrie* took only \$16m, opening in third. Overall, *Evil Dead* made more money domestically – 55.6% of the film's revenue came from US cinemas, while *Carrie* was more successful in foreign markets (58.4%), but it was released in ten additional countries to *Evil Dead*'s 42. Most importantly, the disparity between the films' production budgets indicates that *Evil Dead*, made for \$17m, would have turned a significantly higher profit than *Carrie*, which had almost twice the budget at \$30m (all figures boxofficemojo.com).

There are commercial and critical factors which are likely to have affected the remakes' success. Firstly, *Carrie*'s (US) release date had been pushed back considerably from mid-March to October 18th, a decision which production studio Sony initially claimed they had taken in order to capitalise on the Halloween season (expectedly, prime time for horror film releases) (Sneider 2013). This seven month delay seems excessive, however, and subsequently the film's star Chloe Grace Moretz revealed to *Fangoria* that it was the result of reshoots to make the film 'scarier' (Gingold 2013a). While any connections between this delay and the anticipation that surrounded *Evil Dead*'s early April release can only be speculative, it is interesting that the teaser trailers for both films were released in October 2012, initiating a significant 'buzz' for *Evil Dead* on account of the film's apparent gruesomeness, which continued over the coming months through incessant early promotion and previews, while Sony's film went relatively unnoticed by comparison. Around the time of the announcement that *Carrie* was delayed, a full length red-band trailer for *Evil Dead* was released, showcasing its extremely gory special effects which the

filmmakers proudly proclaimed were entirely practical (Dickson 2013a). Such effects offered both a neat counterpoint to the CGI-laden *Carrie* trailer and the common complaint over horror remakes' frequent updating of such effects (see comments in Dickson 2013a, for example). Delaying *Carrie* offered audiences a distance between the two remakes and avoided competition with *Evil Dead*, but it also introduced a risk – pushing the film's release into the start of awards season, where it opened behind the profitable and popular *Captain Phillips* (Paul Greengrass, 2013) and *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) (already on their second and third weekends, respectively).

There were both strategic decisions and unfortunate coincidences which no doubt affected *Carrie*'s success then, and yet it was the critical response to the film which largely indicates why it failed to do as well as *Evil Dead*. Reviews of both films were fairly mixed, but reactions to *Evil Dead* were generally more positive. Popular sites such as *Rotten Tomatoes* and *Metacritic*, which aggregate audience and critic reviews to calculate a rating indicative of responses (although not particularly scientific in their methodology and therefore not entirely authoritative), provide an overview for comparisons of general reception across large numbers of viewers – and show *Carrie* as the considerably less well-received of the two films. Many reviews praised Kimberly Peirce's direction, and the updating of De Palma's film (as well as the Stephen King novel on which both versions were based) to include a contemporary focus on high school life and cyberbullying (the opening sequence where naïve Carrie [Chloe Grace Moretz] gets her first period and is tormented by her classmates here sees them upload photographs and videos of the incident to social media websites) (see for example Bradshaw 2013, Brody 2013, LaSalle 2013, Dickson 2013b). Yet the film was criticised, often by the same reviewers, for an apparent failure to set an appropriate 'tone' (seemingly aimed at a teen audience, but not carrying a PG13 rating), the casting of Moretz (less convincing in her portrayal of Carrie's frailty and general 'oddness' than Sissy Spacek's famed performance; Moretz's persona is informed by earlier roles which emphasise her strength in films such as *Kick-Ass* [Matthew Vaughn 2010], *Let Me In* [Matt

Reeves 2010] and the comedy television show *30 Rock* [NBC 2006-2013]), and, expectedly given reaction to the film's trailer, *Carrie*'s overuse of CGI.

It was the opposite of this latter point for which many viewers praised *Evil Dead*. The film features extreme sequences of body horror (much of it self-induced) and grotesque images of mutilation and decay. While a number of reviewers in the mainstream press complained over the film's excessive gore and violence, frequently drawing comparisons to torture porn which they felt were problematic (see for example Roeper 2013, Edelstein 2013, Glasby 2013), the majority of responses were relatively positive, especially from horror websites and fan communities which praised the practical effects and the film's reluctance to sanitise its brutal, bloody violence, marking it out as a 'thrillingly gory blast' (Dickson 2013c) or 'buckets of bloody fun' (Gingold 2013b) (see also 'thehorrorchick' 2013, Nashawaty 2013, Olsen 2013). Other elements seem to have impacted on *Evil Dead*'s reception, such as the credibility awarded to the new version through the producer trio of the original film's director, Sam Raimi, producer Robert Tapert and star Bruce Campbell, their selection and promotion of director Fede Alvarez, and the decision not to recast the now iconic character Ash (Campbell), instead replacing him with a female lead, Mia (Jane Levy). The simplistic plot is also updated to provide a legitimate reason (weaning Mia from her substance addiction) for a group of friends to be isolated in a cabin in the woods (the original, and many horror films since, had been parodied in this sense by 2012's *The Cabin in the Woods*, meaning any failure to justify such a locale in subsequent titles would likely be mocked).

The production and reception of *Evil Dead* and *Carrie* exemplify both the continuing remaking trend and the issues that surround it. Alvarez's film was ultimately praised in its positive reviews for representing a respectful homage that captures the tone of Raimi's cult film. *Evil Dead* features references to the original in the dialogue, in the reappearance of props (a grandfather clock and the Oldsmobile Delta which Raimi incorporates into his films) and cinematographic technique (Raimi's 'shakey-cam'), and a much-requested cameo from Campbell which, irreverent and unnecessary to the plot, features

post-credits so as to appease fans while not distracting from what the film is doing on its own terms. It is in this balance between sameness and difference where *Evil Dead* arguably succeeds (as, indeed, does any well-received remake); it acknowledges the original film and its audience, draws from and develops the source text, while carefully adapting and updating certain elements (here, plot, characters and effects) in order to both mark distinction from the earlier work, and align with contemporary genre trends thus appealing to a new audience's sensibilities and expectations (for example, the impressive gore and the inclusion of a strong, central female protagonist). *Carrie*, by contrast, while attempting to more faithfully adapt King's novel - the relationship between Carrie and Sue Snell (Gabriella Wilde) is developed, and a subplot involving Sue's pregnancy is reinstated – ultimately fails to distinguish itself from De Palma's film by often too closely emulating it, and its reception suffered as a result (a clear example of Robert Stam's assertion that adapters can 'never win' [Stam 2005: 8]). While *Evil Dead's* reviewers noted that fans of the original should welcome the remake, and praised it as a strong work of contemporary horror in its own right, the more negative responses to *Carrie* drew comparisons with the original to the new version's detriment, framed its discussion within parameters of pointlessness (even defences of the film posit the question 'why remake *Carrie*?' [Patterson 2013]) and labelled it by turns 'largely redundant' and 'forgettable' (Woodward 2013), 'relentlessly lifeless' and 'anaemic' (Bradshaw 2013) and 'atrocious by comparison' (Edelstein 2013a).

Despite the disparity between their receptions, the release of these two fairly major films shows that horror remakes continue to be produced and that there remains an audience for them. While the production of remakes has slowed in recent years, this appears to be indicative of stabilisation rather than the trend coming to an end. Furthermore, release patterns over the last decade do not provide a reliable basis for anticipating how the remake may or may not continue to contribute to the evolving horror genre (as addressed in chapter 1). I would suggest, however, that proclamations of the trend's demise (see for example Dickson 2014) are premature and unsupported. Wide releases for

Texas Chainsaw 3D, *Evil Dead* and *Carrie* within the last year suggest that studios still consider remaking as a potentially profitable option. There are new versions of *Poltergeist*, *Day of the Dead*, Stephen King's *IT* and *The Stand* (both previously adapted for television) and *Pet Semetary*, among others, in development or production (see Lussier 2014, Shaw-Williams 2013, Lynch 2014, Shaw 2013, Kroll 2013). Cult and horror films from outside of America continue to provide inspiration for additional remakes, most recently with *Oldboy* (Park Chan-wook 2003/Spike Lee 2013), the first film of Park Chan-wook's 'vengeance trilogy' to be adapted for an English-speaking audience (the other two instalments, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* [2002] and *Lady Vengeance* [2005] also have remakes in development [Fischer 2013]). Additionally, a reboot of *The Grudge* series is in development, a decade after the release of Takashi Shimizu's American remake of his own 2002 Japanese film, itself the third in a series (McNary 2014). Generic recycling is also not limited to the cinematic. Recent television series based on characters from *The Silence of the Lambs* (*Hannibal*, NBC 2013 - present) and *Psycho* (*Bates Motel*, Universal, 2013 - present) have been successful in creating new appropriations of existing stories across a different medium. Such examples only underline the complexities of remaking and the limitations of understanding the process as a linear relationship between original and copy.

By seriously addressing the horror remake and the practice of remaking, this doctoral thesis has introduced new avenues for considering adaptation. Remakes have, historically, been excluded from or marginalised within the field of adaption studies, yet they provide key examples of how contemporary adaptation 'works' as part of an intertextual tendency towards cinematic recycling and repetition. Areas which have been discursively exhausted in such studies – namely, discussions of fidelity and attempts at precise definitions and taxonomies – can be readdressed through studying the remake. I have shown how such concerns remain intrinsic to understanding the remake and its reception, and a number of films throughout this study have further exemplified the way in which a remake's success is often judged by how well it both adopts

and adapts particular elements of source texts – patterns of similarity and difference remain important.

This study has also challenged the notion that horror remakes are simplistic copies which somehow damage or erase the purpose or status of an original film. Firstly, I have shown how many horror adaptations distinguish themselves not only from their source but also each other; no remake is an exact carbon copy, and not all remakes are alike. Frequently, they represent some of the more creative recent examples in an ever-evolving and popular genre, and the successes of the more commercial examples in turn allow for this continual development. Secondly, remaking a particular film or rebooting a film franchise may in fact enable a certain level of re-evaluation of the original's status, and how its 'meaning' may have been interpreted. Thirdly, the existence of a remake does not negate the significance of an original film; the production of a new version may in fact reignite a critical interest in that earlier work, or even contribute to its canonisation. Remakes cannot, and should not, only be considered in simplistic ways which reduce their purpose to one of sole commercial imperative – at least not without the understanding that this is, at a basic level, the purpose of all filmmaking. Rather, it is more productive to consider the part which remaking plays in much wider contemporary cultural trends, as intertextual adaptations which trade on nostalgia and memory.

Remaking shows no signs of abating, and continues to play a significant part in the development and reception of the genre. If the sequel was a 'genuinely distinctive feature' (Tudor 2002: 106) of horror cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, then we should similarly understand and appreciate the remake as such in the 2000s and 2010s to date. Just as the sequelisation trend did not signify a dearth of creativity and originality within horror at that time (indeed, many of the sequels in question belonged to franchises initiated in the 1980s by original films, *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Hellraiser*, *Poltergeist*, *The Evil Dead* and *Child's Play* [Tom Holland, 1988] among them), neither does remaking indicate inertia or staleness in the horror genre today. Chapter 1 listed a number of cinematic trends of the last decade as evidence of

the genre's ever-evolving nature, chapter 5 exemplified the slasher remake's contribution to such evolution alongside a significant number of original releases, and chapter 7 showed how new versions must themselves evolve from their origins to 'fit in' with contemporary genre trends (as I again argued of the remakes under discussion at the beginning of this chapter). To suggest that remakes are symptomatic of some kind of staid resistance to progression within the genre is to ignore both the wealth of other original (and often, successful) releases of the last ten years, the distinctions between horror remakes themselves, and the levels of creativity witnessed within a number of the adaptations under consideration in this study.

If the question of 'why' genre films are remade, or the notion of remaking's 'pointlessness', still pervade critical responses to horror remakes a decade after their proliferation, we might ask why such concerns have yet to draw a close to the trend. The simple answer is that an audience exists for remakes, just as an audience exists for horror, and that the two are intertwined for horror remakes. Producing any form of remake, reboot, sequel or prequel represents a low risk as it ensures a profitable safety net in the form of a guaranteed audience, familiar with an original film and curious to see how a new version or continuation turns out. If an adaptation offers something new, something previously unseen or an improvement or correction of sorts, and can be marketed to an audience unfamiliar with the original, even better. In the case of genre cinema, and particularly horror, there is an even wider loyal audience guaranteed to seek out new releases, known title or otherwise, and some of the people most vociferously opposing the trend are the same as those paying to see a remake on its opening weekend. Asking why horror films are being remade results in one simple, resounding answer: they offer relatively low cost productions with an assured market and the potential to draw in significant profit. Yet such imperatives are not exclusive to remakes, and other strands of production do not attract such levels of scorn. Furthermore, the commercial potential for remakes is often, as I have consistently shown, the least interesting aspect of their production. Horror remakes contribute significantly to

contemporary genre cinema, and their popularity and propagation warrant more considered critical attention and serious academic study than they have so far been granted. This thesis introduces new arguments and areas for discussion, and has offered explanation and consideration of the phenomenon to date.

I introduced this thesis with a quote from Kim Newman, who anticipated that the next stage in the trend would be found in ‘remakes of remakes’ (Newman 2009) – and with *The Grudge*, *Day of the Dead* and *Texas Chainsaw 3D*, for example, we might well understand that to be the case. However, I do not share Newman’s certainty (nor his pessimism) that this is due to the ‘finite number of remakable films [having] run out’ (Newman 2009). Rather, such films are evidence of the new and ever-evolving ways in which filmmakers continue to adapt earlier works, and how this in turn contributes to horror’s continual development. The horror genre is not lifeless or uninspired. It is not labouring under the weight of commercially driven, parasitic texts or suffering at the hands of ‘greedy studio executives’ (Hantke 2010: x). It is – as it ever was –shifting, adapting and changing shape, and the re-cyclical nature of horror cinema only contributes to its evolution. Remakes are not the death of the horror genre. Rather, they represent its remarkable capacity to reanimate.

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Appendix 1: American Horror Remakes, 2003-2013

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	2003	Nispel, Marcus	USA	New Line/Focus/Radar/Platinum Dunes	
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre	1974	Hooper, Tobe	USA	Vortex	
Toolbox Murders	2003	Hooper, Tobe	USA	Alpine Pictures/Scary Movies/Toolbox Murders Inc.	
The Toolbox Murders	1978	Donnelly, Dennis	USA	Cal-Am Productions/Tony DiDio	
Willard	2003	Morgan, Glen	Canada/USA	New Line Cinema	
Willard	1971	Mann, Daniel	USA	Bing Crosby Productions	
Dawn of the Dead	2004	Snyder, Zack	USA/ Canada/ Japan/ France	Strike/ New Amsterdam/ Metropolitan/ Toho-Towa	
Dawn of the Dead	1978	Romero, George A.	Italy/USA	Laurel Group	
The Stepford Wives	2004	Oz, Frank	USA	Paramount/ Dreamworks/ Scott Rudin/ De Line	
The Stepford Wives	1975	Forbes, Brian	USA	Fadsin/ Palomar	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
2001 Maniacs	2005	Sullivan, Tim	USA	BloodWorks/ RawNerve/ Velvet Steamroller	
Two Thousand Maniacs!	1964	Lewis, Herschell Gordon	USA	Jacqueline Kay/ Friedman-Lewis	
House of Wax	2005	Collet-Serra, Jaume	Australia/USA	Warner Bros./ Village Roadshow/ Dark Castle	
House of Wax	1953	De Toth, Andre	USA	Bryan Foy/ Warner Bros.	
The Amityville Horror	2005	Douglas, Andrew	USA	Dimension/ MGM/ United Artists/ Platinum Dunes/ Radar	
The Amityville Horror	1979	Rosenberg, Stuart	USA	American International Pictures/ Cinema 77/ Professional Films	
The Fog	2005	Wainwright, Rupert	USA/France	Revolution/ Debra Hill/ David Foster	
The Fog	1980	Carpenter, John	USA	AVCO Embassy/ EDI/ Debra Hill	
The Cabinet of Dr Caligari	2005	Fisher, David Lee	USA	Highlander Films	See also 1962 & 1991 versions
The Cabinet of Dr Caligari	1920	Wiene, Robert	Germany	Decla-Bioscop AG	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
Black Christmas	2006	Morgan, Glen	USA/Canada	Dimension/ 2929 Productions/ Adelstein-Parouse/ Hard Eight	
Black Christmas	1974	Clark, Bob	Canada	Film Funding Ltd of Canada/ Vision IV/ CFDC	
Night Of The Living Dead 3D	2006	Broadstreet, Jeff	USA	The Horrorworks/Lux Digital	See also 1990 version
Night of the Living Dead	1968	Romero, George A.	USA	Image Ten/ Laurel Group/ Market Square/ Off Colour	
Sisters	2006	Buck, Douglas	USA/ Canada/ UK	Edward R. Pressman Film/ Image Entertainment/ No Remorse/ Grosvenor	
Sisters	1973	De Palma, Brian	USA	AIP/ Pressman-Williams	
The Hills Have Eyes	2006	Aja, Alexandre	USA	Craven-Maddalena/ Dune/ Major Studio Partners	
The Hills Have Eyes	1977	Craven, Wes	USA	Blood Relations Co.	
The Omen	2006	Moore, John	USA	Twentieth Century Fox / 11:11 Mediaworks	
The Omen	1976	Donner, Richard	UK/USA	Twentieth Century Fox	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
When A Stranger Calls	2006	West, Simon	USA	Screen Gems/ Davis Entertainment	
When A Stranger Calls	1979	Walton, Fred	USA	Columbia/ Melvin Simon	
Halloween	2007	Zombie, Rob	USA	Dimension/ Nightfall/ Spectacle/ Trancas/ Weinstein Co.	
Halloween	1978	Carpenter, John	USA	Compass International/ Falcon International	
The Hitcher	2007	Meyers, Dave	USA	Focus/ Intrepid/ Platinum Dunes	
The Hitcher	1986	Harmon, Robert	USA	HBO Pictures/ Silver Screen Partners	
The Invasion	2007	Hirschbiegel, Oliver	USA/Australia	Warner Bros./ Village Roadshow/ Silver/ Vertigo	See also 1978 & 1993 versions
Invasion of the Bodysnatchers	1956	Siegel, Don	USA	Walter Wanger Productions	
The Wizard of Gore	2007	Kasten, Jeremy	USA	Open Sky/ Sick-A-Scope	
The Wizard of Gore	1970	Lewis, Herschell Gordon	USA	Mayflower Pictures	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
April Fools Day	2008	Altieri, Mitchell/ Flores, Phil	USA	360 Pictures	
April Fools Day	1986	Walton, Fred	USA	Paramount/ Hometown Films/ TCTM	
Day of the Dead	2008	Miner, Steve	USA	Millenium Films/ Taurus/ Emmett/Furla / Nu Image	
Day of The Dead	1985	Romero, George A.	USA	Dead Films/ Laurel Entertainment/ Laurel- Day	
It's Alive	2008	Rusnak, Josef	USA	Alive Productions/ Amicus Entertainment/ Foresight Unlimited/ Millenium films	
It's Alive	1974	Cohen, Larry	USA	Warner Bros./ Larco Productions	
Prom Night	2008	McCormick, Nelson	USA/Canada	Alliance/Newmarket/ Original Film	
Prom Night	1980	Lynch, Paul	Canada	Quadrant Trust/ Simcom	
Friday the 13th	2009	Nispel, Marcus	USA	New Line/ Paramount/ Platinum Dunes/ Crystal Lake Entertainment	
Friday the 13th	1980	Cunningham, Sean S.	USA	Paramount/ Georgetown Prods./ Sean S Cunningham Films	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
My Bloody Valentine	2009	Lussier, Patrick	USA	Lionsgate/ Paradise FX	
My Bloody Valentine	1981	Mihalka, George	Canada	Paramount/ CFDC/Famous Players/ Secret Films	
Sorority Row	2009	Hendler, Stewart	USA	Karz Entertainment/ Summit	
The House On Sorority Row	1983	Rosman, Mark	USA	VAE	
The Last House on The Left	2009	Iliadis, Dennis	USA	Rogue/ Scion/ Film Afrika/ Midnight	
The Last House On The Left	1972	Craven, Wes	USA	Sean S Cunningham Films/ Lobster/ The Night Co.	
The Stepfather	2009	McCormick, Nelson	USA	Screen Gems/ Maverick/ Imprint/ Granada	
The Stepfather	1987	Ruben, Joseph	UK/USA	ITC	
Night of the Demons	2009	Gierasch, Adam	USA	Project 8 Films/Cold Fusion Media Group/Parallel Media/Seven Arts	
Night of the Demons	1988	Tenney, Kevin S.	USA	Meridian Productions/ Paragon Arts International/ Republic Pictures/ Skouras	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
Children of the Corn (TV)	2009	Borchers, Donald P.	USA	Children of the Corn Productions/Planet Productions	
Children of the Corn	1984	Kiersch, Fritz	USA	Angeles Entertainment/Cinema Group/Gatlin/Hal Roach/Inverness/ Planet	
A Nightmare On Elm Street	2010	Bayer, Samuel	USA	New Line/ Platinum Dunes	
A Nightmare On Elm Street	1984	Craven, Wes	USA	New Line/ Media Home/ Smart Egg	
Don't Be Afraid of the Dark	2010	Nixey, Troy	USA/Australia	Gran Via/ Miramax/ Tequila Gang	
Don't Be Afraid Of The Dark (TV)	1973	Newland, John	USA	Lorimar	
I Spit On Your Grave	2010	Monroe, Steven R	USA	Cinetel Films/Anchor Bay Films/Family Of The Year	
I Spit On Your Grave	1978	Zarchi, Meir	USA	Cinemagic	
Mother's Day	2010	Bousman, Darren Lynn	USA	The Genre Co/ LightTower/Rat/ Troma	
Mother's Day	1980	Kaufman, Charles	USA	Duty/ Saga/ Troma	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
Piranha	2010	Aja, Alexandre	USA	Dimension/IPW/ Aja/ Levasseur Productions/ Atmosphere/ Chako/ The Weinstein Co.	See also 1995 TV version
Piranha	1978	Dante, Joe	USA	New World Pictures	TV movie
The Crazies	2010	Eisner, Breck	USA/ United Arab Emirates	Overture/ Participant Media/ Imagination/ Penn Station	
The Crazies	1973	Romero, George A	USA	Pittsburgh Films	
The Wolfman	2010	Johnston, Joe	USA	Universal/ Relativity/ Stuber	
The Wolf Man	1941	Waggner, George	USA	Universal	
Fright Night	2011	Gillespie, Craig	UK/USA	Albuquerque/ DreamWorks/ Gaeta/Rosenweig/ Michael DeLuca	
Fright Night	1985	Holland, Tom	USA	Columbia/ Delphi IV/ Vistar	
The Thing	2011	van Heijningen, Matthijs	USA/Canada	Morgan Creek/Universal/Strike Entertainment	
The Thing	1982	Carpenter, John	USA	Universal/Turman-Foster	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
Straw Dogs	2011	Lurie, Rod	USA	Screen Gems/Battleplan	
Straw Dogs	1971	Peckinpah, Sam	USA/UK	ABC Pictures/Talent Associates/Amerbroco	
Silent Night	2012	Miller, Steven C.	Canada/USA	the Genre Co/Buffalo Gal Pictures/Ember Productions/Empire Film and Entertainment	
Silent Night, Deadly Night	1984	Sellier Jr., Charles E	USA	Tri Star Pictures/SlayRide	
Maniac	2012	Kahlfoun, Frank	France/USA	Aja/Levasseur Productions/Blue Underground/Canal +/Cine+/La Petite	
Maniac	1980	Lustig, William	USA	Magnum Motion Pictures Inc.	
Don't Look in the Basement	2012	Rowe Kelly, Alan	USA	Southpaw Pictures/Tinycore Pictures	
Don't Look in the Basement/The Forgotten	1973	Brownrigg, S.F.	USA	Camera 2 Productions/Century Films	
Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D	2013	Luessenhopp, John	USA	Lionsgate/Mainline Pictures/Millennium Films/Nu Image Films	
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre	1974	Hooper, Tobe	USA	Vortex	

Title	Year	Director	Country	Production Company	Notes
Evil Dead	2013	Alvarez, Fede	USA	FilmDistrict/Ghost House Pictures/Sony Pictures Entertainment	
The Evil Dead	1981	Raimi, Sam	USA	Renaissance Pictures	
Plan 9	2013	Johnson, John	USA	Darkstone Entertainment	
Plan 9 From Outer Space	1959	Wood Jr, Edward D	USA	Reynolds Pictures	
Carrie	2013	Peirce, Kimberly	USA	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Screen Gems	See also 2002 TV version
Carrie	1976	De Palma, Brian	USA	Redbank	

Appendix II: Publications

Appendix IIa: The re-rape and revenge of Jennifer Hills: Gender and genre in *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010)

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Abstract

This article aims to address the largely negative critical response to Steven R. Monroe's remake of *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010), by both considering its themes in comparison to Meir Zarchi's 1978 original film, and positioning the new version within its own generic context. Using examples from feminist film theory that analyses Zarchi's film, I suggest that Monroe's version not only interprets, but actively enhances the perceived feminist message of the original, and consider how role reversal during the revenge section of the film contributes to this. I also outline the way in which Monroe's film can be understood as representative of recent trends in the horror genre – most notably, its inclusion of explicit, gory violence and themes of retribution. Ultimately, the portrayal of the remake's female protagonist as less sexualized and arguably more monstrous than the original character works in conjunction with other changes and a torture porn aesthetic in order to position the film clearly within the context of contemporary horror cinema.

Keywords

remake
rape-revenge
contemporary horror cinema
torture porn
gender
feminism

This article focuses on *I Spit on Your Grave* (Steven R. Monroe, 2010), a recent remake of Meir Zarchi's controversial 1978 film of the same name. Following

festival screenings and a limited theatrical release in America and the United Kingdom, director Steven R. Monroe's film was released on DVD in early 2011 to a mixed critical response of indifference, derision and disgust. With the exception of a handful of positive reviews (mostly on horror forums),²⁷ this new version attracted criticism that, while frequently acknowledging marked improvements upon the original's direction, acting, script and cinematography, repeatedly drew attention to the perceived 'pointlessness' of remaking Zarchi's film. Excerpts from some of the more negative reviews highlight this opinion, suggesting the film is 'a completely worthless enterprise that offers nothing to the world other than the crushing realisation that it exists' (Hall 2010), and describing it as 'witless, ugly and unnecessary [...] a generic, distasteful and pointless photocopy of a flick that doesn't deserve one' (Weinberg 2010). Even the most scathing reviews were constructed around the notion of *I Spit on Your Grave's* 'worthlessness'. *Little White Lies*, for instance, labelled it 'completely pointless, like being in the *Guinness Book of Records* for eating a wheelbarrow of your own shit', and claimed 'the most shocking thing about this film is that anyone bothered to make it once, let alone twice' (Glasby 2011).

Discourses of insignificance often feature in reviews of any remake – and of horror remakes in particular. Yet the criticism levelled at Monroe's film seems excessive by comparison, and is accompanied in many cases by vitriolic comment on its violent content. In a review that reflects upon his own, now infamous, response to Zarchi's film (Ebert 1980), Roger Ebert refers to this new version as a 'despicable remake' of a 'despicable film' that 'works even better as vicarious cruelty against women', before suggesting that couples in the audience may wish to rethink their future together should one of them find the film remotely enjoyable (Ebert 2010). Also known by Zarchi's original title *Day of The Woman*, and on an early poster as *The Rape and Revenge of Jennifer Hills* (Kerekes and Slater 2000: 190); the 1978 film initially encountered similar complaints regarding its brutal depictions of sexual violence, yet has subsequently come to be widely discussed within feminist psychoanalytical film

²⁷ See Newman (2011), Hayes (2010), McCannibal (2010) for examples.

theory due to its rape-revenge narrative and infamous castration scene.²⁸

However, it remains problematic as a legitimate example of a feminist text, due in no small part to the highly sexualized depiction of its female protagonist and the methods by which she undertakes her revenge. This article aims to address the largely negative response to the remake of *I Spit on Your Grave* by analysing some of the film's themes in comparison to the original, with particular attention to the way in which Monroe's version can be seen to both interpret and enhance the perceived feminist message of Zarchi's film. Carol J. Clover's (1993) and Barbara Creed's (1993) analyses of the 1978 film remain the most useful in approaching its gender issues, and are used here as a framework for comparison with the remake, before moving on to consider how Monroe's film should also be positioned within its own genre context by looking at recent trends in contemporary horror cinema.

Rape and the city/country divide

The plot of the original runs as follows. A writer from New York, Jennifer Hills (Camille Keaton), escapes to a secluded lakeside cabin to spend the summer working on her latest novel. There she encounters a group of four local men who, under the pretext of 'deflowering' mentally challenged virgin Matthew (Richard Pace), capture Jennifer, and subject her to a series of brutal rapes. Matthew, unable to bring himself to kill her as instructed by the gang's ringleader Johnny (Eron Tabor), coats a knife in her blood to lead the others into believing her dead, and leaves her for such in her cabin. Jennifer slowly recovers from the attack and sets about undertaking her revenge. She hangs Matthew, castrates Johnny, kills Stanley (Anthony Nichols) with an axe, and Andy (Gunter Kleemann) with a boat propeller. Monroe's remake follows the same narrative thread as Zarchi's film, retaining enough of the plot and offering in-jokes and visual references to the original in order to appeal to its fans. For example, Jennifer (Sarah Butler) buys \$19.78 worth of petrol in a nod to the original year of release, and Andy (Rodney Eastman) ominously greets her at

²⁸ See Clover (1993), Creed (1993), Read (2000) for examples.

the garage by playing his harmonica – which he also does through part of the rape scenes in the 1978 version. Yet there are sufficient changes that work to distinguish it from Zarchi's film. The rape scenes, although brutal, are less protracted, placing more emphasis on Jennifer's degradation and mental torture than any explicitly sexual act, while the violence and gore during the revenge sequences is intensified in a series of increasingly creative and gruesome set pieces. The addition of the local Sheriff (Andrew Howard) to the gang of rapists both changes the group dynamic and answers the question of why Jennifer exacts her own bloody revenge, rather than going to the police.

In *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1993), Carol J. Clover suggests that *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) is 'an almost crystalline example of the double-axis revenge plot so popular in modern horror: the revenge of the woman on her rapist, and the revenge of the city on the country' (Clover 1993: 115). Leaving aside the woman versus rapist axis for the moment, it is worth first considering how the films deal with said city versus country polarities. The city, representative of civilization and normality, pitched against the threatening, rural Other is a widely recognized trope in horror cinema; consider *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) or *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven, 1977), as well as their respective reboots (Nispel, 2003; Aja, 2006).²⁹ The relocation of action from the city to the country in horror cinema (and notably in rape-revenge films) is a trope that, as Clover notes, 'rests squarely on what may be a universal archetype' (Clover 1993: 124), ascribing a folkloric, fairy tale quality to these films:

Going from city to country in horror film is in any case very much like going from village to deep, dark forest in traditional fairy tales. Consider Little Red Riding Hood, who strikes off into the wilderness only to be captured and eaten by a wolf (whom she foolishly trusts), though she is finally saved by a passing woodsman. Multiply and humanize the wolf, read 'rape' for 'eat', skip the woodsman (let Red save herself), and you have *I Spit on Your Grave*. (Clover 1993: 124)

²⁹ See Clover (1993: 124–37, 160–65) for a detailed discussion of city versus country themes (or 'urbanoia') in horror cinema and further references.

I Spit on Your Grave, alongside films such as *The Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972), represented a shift in the 1970s from rape as a narrative aside to rape-revenge as a 'drama complete unto itself [...] (in folkloric terms, what had been a motif graduated into a tale-type)' (Clover 1993: 137). The importance of *I Spit on Your Grave* in understanding rape-revenge as folklore is apparent then, and Clover's assertion that 'horror movies look like nothing so much as folk tales – a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what are in effect variants: sequels, remakes and rip-offs' (Clover 1993: 10) would further suggest that Monroe's remake should function in much the same way as Zarchi's film. And yet, while the 'wolves' are just as vicious and 'Red' just as vengeful, the blurring of the city/country divide in the 2010 film arguably reduces the folkloric elements of Clover's 'double-axis' plot.

Zarchi's film amplifies the differences between educated, affluent and sophisticated Jennifer and her hillbilly rapists. 'You're from an evil place', Matthew tells Jennifer upon their first meeting, after Hills rewards him with what she refers to as a 'big tip from an evil New Yorker' for delivering her groceries. We are reminded of Jennifer's city status through her internal monologue as she works on her book, and the assumptions that the men draw from this during the harrowing rape scenes, where Andy, mocking her unfinished manuscript as he tears up the pages, exclaims 'New York broads sure fuck a lot'. Jennifer Hills 2010, meanwhile, might not speak with the heavy southern accent of her tormentors, but her city credentials are only assumed, and never made explicit. Despite referral to her as a 'stuck-up city bitch', or a 'big-city, cock-teasing whore', Butler's Jennifer never flaunts this fact in the slightly patronizing way that Keaton's did. There are no establishing shots here of Jennifer's doorman seeing her on her way as she escapes the concrete jungle and noisy streets of Manhattan, as there are in the original film. She stops for petrol in a 4x4, and seems just at home in practical jeans and a check shirt as the men do, rather than her 1978 counterpart's dress and high heels, which signify her as a city

dweller. Her initial banter with Johnny (Jeff Branson) is friendly, and there is no mention of where she has travelled from. Her biggest 'crime', then, does not seem to be that she is somehow seen to boast her 'big-city' superiority over the men, as Jennifer arguably does in the original film, but simply that she has the audacity not to find them attractive; to laugh at Johnny when he tries to seduce her, and to unintentionally humiliate him in front of his friends as a result of this rejection. It is also worth noting that perhaps the most crudely drawn southern/country stereotype in the film is old-timer Earl (Tracey Walter), who happens to be the only amiable character that Jennifer encounters, and certainly the only male genuinely concerned for her welfare. The men do, on occasion, take umbrage with what they perceive to be snobbishness on Hills's part: before forcing her to drink liquor during her ordeal, Johnny asks her 'you too good to have a drink with us? What are we to you, bunch of dirt?' However, as Kim Newman observes in his review for *Sight & Sound*, 'she pointedly doesn't express any negative attitude on class grounds, and even when she comes back for revenge belittles them not for their backgrounds but for their actions (which, in this context, makes her saintly)' (Newman 2011). It is not my intention here to suggest that the city versus country dichotomy is not an issue in *I Spit* 2010, but rather that this axis is played out in the narrative through the men's own insecurities rather than Jennifer believing herself to be superior in any way, and that this is ultimately used as their excuse for attacking her. Clover discusses the rapes of the original as a sporting act that functions as a test of group dynamics and hierarchy, with Jennifer as mere playing field on which this game is carried out (Clover 1993: 122).³⁰ This is certainly evident here, in Johnny's need to regain respect as ringleader of the gang after Hills humiliates him, and in the power struggle between Johnny and Sheriff Storch, who asserts his authority by delegating tasks during Jennifer's assault. But the rapes are also clearly the group's way of teaching the 'stuck up city bitch' a lesson and an attempt to put her back in what they see to be her place.³¹ Thus,

³⁰ Critic Joe Bob Briggs also observes this in his 2004 DVD commentary: 'These men look at rape as a recreational sport, proving their manhood to one another'.

³¹ Interestingly, this clearly resounds with radical feminist Robin Morgan's statement that 'knowing our place is the message of rape – as it was for blacks the message of lynchings.'

Clover's 'double axis' of city versus country and man (as rapist) versus woman function in the remake in ways that are intertwined.

The attacks on Hills are noticeably different across the two versions of */ Spit* – most obviously in the screen time dedicated to the act of rape itself. While both of the films devote around 25 minutes to these scenes, the original shows three separate, increasingly violent rapes that take up much of this time. The remake instead emphasizes Jennifer's psychological assault and humiliation. Over a period of twenty minutes, Hills is forced to drink liquor, has lit matches thrown at her, and is made to perform fellatio on first a bottle and then a pistol ('if I don't like your enthusiasm, I may cum bad', Johnny warns her), before escaping – only to encounter Storch. Initially believing him to be a potential saviour, a twist reveals the Sheriff to in fact be the leader of her gang of tormentors and thus her ordeal begins anew as she is made to strip and dance for the group. The focus on Hills's bullying in the remake coincides with feminist discourses of rape as a display of man's violent power over women rather than as an explicitly sexual act; these men appear more angry than aroused.³² The attacks are largely shot in a similar way to those in Zarchi's film in respect to the point of view with which the audience is awarded. As with the original scenes, the initial intrusion is from Jennifer's perspective. The group enter her cabin as we watch from inside, just as helpless as she is; the viewer is not offered the opportunity to identify with her attackers as they conspire to break in. The camcorder footage Stanley (Daniel Franzese) shoots, witnessed by the audience first hand, positions the perspective briefly with the gang, but rather than 'encouraging viewer complicity' with the rapists, as the BBFC suggest in a press statement justifying their associated required cuts (Anon. 2010), it instead acts self-reflexively, forcing the audience to question what they are seeing, while also highlighting Jennifer's discomfort by having her effectively address the camera. When the first rape occurs, we witness the events equally from both Matthew (Chad Lindberg) and Jennifer's points of view. By the second

Neither is an act of spontaneity or sexuality – they are both acts of political terrorism' (Morgan 1977, in Read 2000: 96) – written a year prior to the release of Zarchi's film.

³² See Read (2000: 104–05) for discussion on this perspective of rape.

attack, association and empathy is solely with Jennifer. The shots directly from her perspective begin to blur, Johnny addressing the camera directly as Jennifer blacks out, in effect making the audience 'fade out' with her. Similarly, as the next scene begins, so the viewer is aligned with Hills, distorted snatches of the men's post-rape jeering vaguely heard as she comes to and the shot comes in to focus. It would be difficult to argue that the scenes present rape in any way other than as a despicable, violent act or that we are encouraged to identify with anyone other than the victim. While the remake does differ in its presentation of Jennifer's rape, then, it essentially works in the same way as the original, albeit with slicker production values and an emphasis on the threat of assault rather than the attack itself. Ultimately, however, it is the revenge section of Monroe's film that displays the starkest difference to Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave*, and it is Jennifer's return as avenger that I will now consider.

Revenge, role reversal and the 'monstrous' feminine

In her study *The Monstrous Feminine*, Barbara Creed discusses Hills as being representative of the 'all-powerful, all-destructive, deadly *femme castratrice*' (Creed 1993: 129). In her dual roles of both symbolically castrated (through the act of rape) and literal castrator (with the emphasis ultimately on the latter), Jennifer's revenge is shown to be justifiable and her actions sympathetic. Yet, Creed argues, the film remains misogynistic in spirit, mainly due to the eroticized depiction of male torture, and its resulting association of death with masochistic pleasure (Creed 1993: 130). Matthew is enticed into the woods by Hills,³³ who bares her body with a promise that she could have given him 'a summer to remember for the rest of your life', then encourages him to penetrate her before she tightens a noose around his neck at the very moment of his ejaculation. After having Johnny literally stare down the barrel of her gun, she chooses not to shoot him, instead taking him back to the cabin. She masturbates him in the bath before severing his penis, his initial reaction being

³³ Creed discusses the murder of Matthew as being 'in the mode of a sacrificial rite', with Jennifer 'dressed in the garb of a priestess or nymph' (Creed 1993: 129), thus further cementing the association between ritual, eroticism and death.

to mistake pain for intense pleasure before he looks down to see his arterial blood spurt forth. While the need to first seduce her rapists in order to then kill them could be understood as some kind of feminist statement, perhaps the use of her body and sexuality as her ultimate weapons, the way in which Jennifer lures her rapists to their eventual deaths is decisively problematic – not so much in the use of seduction to entrap her tormentors-turned-victims, but in the fact that (and particularly in Matthew's case) she actually follows through with the sexual acts offered as allurements. Conversely, 2010 Jennifer's method for capturing her attackers involves no enticement, no luring them with nudity or the promise of a 'nice, hot bath'. Instead, they are caught in bear traps or knocked out with a baseball bat; the one exception being to expose her behind to Johnny anonymously in order to get him close enough to hit him over the head with a crowbar. Furthermore, and in parallel to how Jennifer's sexuality is portrayed and used in each film, there is a very distinct contrast in the way she is physically presented across the versions. Keaton spends much of the first act in a bikini, a dress or apparently bra-less in a thin shirt, and is often heavily made up. Butler, meanwhile, is usually seen in jeans, running gear or pyjamas and minimal make up. The early, brief scene in which she sunbathes by the lake in a bikini was added, according to Monroe in his director's commentary, as homage to similar shots of Keaton in Zarchi's original.

For Creed, in *I Spit on Your Grave*, 'woman-as-victim is represented as an abject thing, [while] man-as-victim is not similarly degraded and humiliated' (Creed 1993: 130). The remake certainly addresses this, primarily by turning each of the attackers' own perversions back on them during Jennifer's revenge. Thus, self-confessed 'ass-man' Storch is anally raped with a loaded shotgun in a mirrored attack, which follows Jennifer's subjection to a similar violation at the hands of the Sheriff. Voyeur Stanley, who filmed Jennifer's assault, has his eyelids pried open with fishing hooks and his eyeballs smeared with fish guts before they are pecked out by a murder of CGI crows while his own camera records his torture; and Andy gets his face dunked in a lye bath as a consequence of his near-drowning Jennifer in a dirty puddle. Johnny, who

reduced Hills to animal status during her ordeal, labelling her a show horse and commanding she show him her teeth, is referred to as an 'ornery stallion' and has his own teeth pulled with pliers before she produces a pair of shears, taunting 'you know what they do to horses that can't be tamed, Johnny? They geld them'. Creed discusses the significance of pulling teeth in Freudian dream analysis, concluding that the meaning of such an act, if the tooth was understood to represent the penis, could be interpreted threefold: as an act of castration, intercourse or masturbation (Creed 1993: 117–19). This association of castration with sexual gratification again signifies a kind of symbolic masochistic pleasure, an element of the original film that, as stated earlier, caused Creed to ultimately view it as a misogynistic text (Creed 1993: 130). Despite this connection, I would suggest that the literal pulling of Johnny's teeth in the remake prior to his actual castration, and the methods Jennifer uses to capture him (violence as opposed to seduction) only serve to further distance Butler's Hills and her vengeance from Keaton's siren and the eroticism of the original's equivalent scene.

Even Matthew's death, via an unwittingly self-inflicted shotgun blast through Storch's body, is reflective of his reluctant complicity in the attacks. Initially refusing to take part in Jennifer's humiliation, vulnerable Matthew only rapes Jennifer after bullying from the other men and Johnny's threat to 'get your clothes off, Matthew, or I'll slice her from chin to cunt'. His attack on Hills is a direct attempt to save both Jennifer from this fate and himself from a potential beating from Johnny and exclusion from the group. And yet, as we have clearly established that Matthew both knows the act to be wrong (he verbally defends Hills, refuses to participate in her assault until Johnny's warning, vomits immediately afterward in disgust, and subsequently suffers flashbacks of the attacks) and ultimately – physically, at least – enjoys it regardless of this fact (he orgasms), he must suffer the consequences of his involvement. As Jennifer states before tightening a noose round his neck, in response to his apologetic exclamations: 'it's just not good enough'. Matthew wakes up to find himself tied to a chair, a string looped round his wrist (in place of the rubber bands he

nervously plays with throughout the first half of the film) that leads to the trigger of the shotgun buried inside Storch but unknowingly pointing in his direction. Despite Storch's warning, Matthew moves to free his arms, killing both himself and the Sheriff – his death explicitly linked to another person in much the same way as his place as Jennifer's rapist was influenced by other members of the gang.

Clover suggests that we may choose to interpret the ways in which Jennifer 1978 dispatches her attackers as 'symbolic rapes, the closest a penis-less person can get to the real thing', but argues that 'the film itself draws the equation only vaguely, if at all [...] it is an available meaning, but the fact that it is not particularly exploited suggests that it is not particularly central' (Clover 1993: 161). The brutal acts of torture in the remake can in contrast be understood as explicitly symbolic rapes that mirror Jennifer's own violations. The restraints that each of the men find themselves in – absent from the original – reflect how Hills was pinned down by the men as they took turns raping her. The intrusions on the male body – Storch's shotgun rape, Stanley's eyes being pecked out, and Johnny being forced to perform fellatio on a pistol before his teeth are wrenched out and his severed penis is stuffed into his mouth – are in direct response to Jennifer's forced anal, vaginal and oral penetrations. The language she uses either explicitly quotes her rapists' jeers of 'no teeth, show horse', 'deep, deep, deep' and 'suck it, bitch', or otherwise highlights how she has turned the tables in ways they could not have imagined possible: 'now it's my turn to fuck you'. This gender role reversal is furthered by the men begging, crying and screaming during their torture, displays of abject terror that traditionally, according to Clover, are gendered feminine (Clover 1993: 51). Thus they are reduced to shows of female traits, a further humiliation that enhances their symbolic castrations. Johnny does respond to pain – 'even your boys didn't piss themselves', Jennifer taunts in response to his reaction to her pulling his teeth. But as the only member of the gang who refuses to cave in and plead, instead laughing maniacally and yelling 'fuck you' at Hills through a

mouthful of blood, he must be literally (as opposed to symbolically) castrated as the ultimate punishment for his actions.

If the fates of her rapists result in them being demasculinized, then Jennifer as their torturer surely runs the risk of becoming phallicized, not just the ultimate 'Final Girl' (Clover 1993), but a near monster who stalks, captures and tortures her prey with practically superhuman strength and prowess. Indeed, one of the issues critics seem to hold with the remake is this shift in Jennifer's personality between the rape and revenge halves of the narrative, and the resulting potential loss of sympathy towards her character.³⁴ Yet this seems an illogical complaint, not least because these two sides of Jennifer represent her as victim and victor, captive and captor, raped and symbolic rapist: dichotomous roles that would obviously see her adopt different traits. Furthermore, Jennifer's strength and determination, her will to fight, her intelligence and physical fitness have already been made apparent throughout the first half of the film. What could be a problematic portrayal of Jennifer as unsympathetic avenger is further balanced with glimpses of the woman she was prior to her ordeal, in the fleeting expressions of hesitance, sadness and disgust on her face as she conducts her revenge. Storch begs Jennifer to release his young daughter (the ironically named Chastity), taken temporarily by Hills as bait, with the plea 'she's just an innocent girl'. 'So was I', Jennifer responds sombrely.³⁵ Bitter reminders throughout the torture scenes of the men's nature keep sympathy firmly on Jennifer's side, and her actions justified; Storch's last words to her are 'I'll rape you in hell; you're just a piece of meat. I'll find you, I'll hunt you down in hell, you bitch'.

Although Hills is represented as a sympathetic character throughout her revenge, there is no doubt that her acts, and the determination with which she carries them out, are indeed monstrous. This is enhanced by her physical

³⁴ See Graham (2010), DeFore (2010), Weinberg (2010), Hall (2010) for examples.

³⁵ Monroe observes in his director's commentary that, although Chastity's subsequent fate is never made clear, this was not addressed as he never assumed viewers would think that Jennifer could harm the girl.

absence during a twenty-minute mid-section that divides the rape and revenge halves of the narrative. We do not see Jennifer's slow recovery and her pre-emptive praying to God for forgiveness as we do in Zarchi's film, although similar scenes were initially shot (and seen in early trailers). Instead, the focus is on the rapists, their group dynamic collapsing and paranoia growing as Jennifer, unseen and anonymous, begins to stalk them over the course of a month – stealing Stanley's home video of the attacks and sending it to Storch's wife, and dropping dead birds on Johnny's doorstep (a motif repeated from her own protracted torture earlier in the film). Again, rather than allowing the audience to identify or sympathize with the men during these sequences, with the possible exception of Matthew, we are instead reminded of their earlier acts. Johnny tries out his pick-up lines on another potential victim. Andy voices disbelief at Matthew's remorse, telling the group 'I think he even feels guilty'. And Storch, in an attempt to tie up 'loose ends', shoots Earl, a man he has known since childhood, at point blank range. Jennifer's sudden, almost silent return after this point, and especially her brutal acts of vengeance, contribute towards a positioning of Monroe's film as one that belongs firmly within the horror genre. Understanding *I Spit* 2010 as a remake, and comparatively analysing it in this context alongside Zarchi's film, is undoubtedly important in addressing its key themes. But in order to establish how the film functions within its own genre context, and indeed to appreciate the necessity of the changes made, Monroe's film should also be considered alongside recent trends in contemporary horror cinema.

Contemporary genre trends, torture porn and retribution

Jacinda Read has argued that categorizing rape-revenge as a sub-genre of horror is problematic, not least due to its parallels with other genres such as the Western, the absence of a clearly defined and unsympathetic monster, and the fact that other revenge dramas are not usually considered within the realms of horror cinema (Read 2000: 25–27). Instead, she suggests rape-revenge should be understood as a 'narrative structure which has been mapped over other genres' (Read 2000: 25). Arguably then, by this understanding, Zarchi's 1978 *I*

Spit on Your Grave is not easily defined as a horror film, and certainly not when judged by more recent genre conventions. The target audience for the remake, meanwhile, is not comprised primarily by fans of 1970s exploitation cinema – with the notable exception of those curious to see how Zarchi's version has been adapted. Rather, Monroe's film is made for a new, young horror audience expecting *Hostel*-esque (Roth, 2005) gruesomeness, and it is to these potential viewers that the film must ultimately appeal. The early buzz and subsequent marketing for the film does rely on the notoriety of the original, a strategy frequently used when promoting horror remakes. This is most obvious in the posters and DVD covers that practically replicate the original's promotional imagery, an unmistakable reference to the infamous, somewhat sexualized shot of Hills from behind, dirty and wounded, her white underwear and shirt (seen in neither version) torn, carrying a bloody knife (a weapon that Jennifer never actually brandishes during the remake). Zarchi's approval of the remake has also been promoted; he retains an executive producer credit and is included in DVD extras discussing the new version as a stand-alone entity, and as a huge compliment and tribute to his original. Yet *I Spit on Your Grave* 2010 is clearly not simply promoted as a respectful retelling of Zarchi's film.

Early reports in the trade press of production company CineTel acquiring the rights to the screenplay suggested that 'contemporary genre fare has become so graphically violent that the original doesn't seem as outrageous as it did 30 years ago', and claimed that the producers were looking at ways to 'ratchet up the shock factor' (Fleming 2008). CineTel President Paul Hertzberg told *Variety*: 'After seeing what was done with an R rating on films like "Saw" [Wan, 2004] and "Hostel", we think we can modernize this story, be competitive with what this marketplace expects and not have to aim for an NC-17 or X rating' (Hertzberg, in Fleming 2008). In acknowledging these films as inspiration for *I Spit on Your Grave*'s adaptation, and by expressing their intention to intensify the 'shock factor', the remake's producers explicitly align the film with a cycle of successful, graphically violent horror that had become popular in the mid-2000s. *Hostel* and *Saw* were included – alongside *The Devil's Rejects*

(Zombie, 2005), *Wolf Creek* (Mclean, 2005) and others – in a 2006 *New York* magazine article by critic David Edelstein to express his personal concerns over a new wave of explicitly violent horror films that he dubbed ‘torture porn’. Edelstein identified these as predominantly mainstream horror films that featured extreme gore and bloodshed, usually within ultraviolent scenes of protracted torture, typically inflicted upon ‘decent people with recognizable human emotions’, and which presented an arguably more ambiguous sense of morality than their generic predecessors (Edelstein 2006). Edelstein’s ‘torture porn’ label became the established term for the more visceral horror cinema of the last decade, although it has attracted criticism from horror fans, critics and academics alike.³⁶ Adam Lowenstein (2011) goes so far as to argue that “‘torture porn’ does not exist”, suggesting that the term ‘spectacle horror’ is a more appropriate working definition for ‘the staging of spectacularly explicit horror for purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventure as much as shock or terror, but without necessarily breaking ties with narrative development or historical allegory’ (Lowenstein 2011: 43).³⁷ The popularity of the torture porn/spectacle horror film remained evident throughout the latter part of the decade with a *Hostel* sequel (Roth, 2007) (followed by a third film, released direct to video [Scott Spiegel, 2011]), and six further, successful instalments of the *Saw* franchise between 2005 and 2010 (as well as a theme park ride and two video game releases). These aside, however, it would be difficult to locate many later texts featuring spectacle horror tropes among

³⁶ *Hostel* director Eli Roth also highlights film-makers’ discomfort with the term:

It shows a lack of understanding and ability to understand and appreciate a horror film as something more than just a horror film. The gore blinds them to any intelligence that goes into making the film. And I think that the term ‘torture porn’ genuinely says more about the critic’s limited understanding of what horror movies can do than about the film itself. (Roth, in Capone 2007)

³⁷ It is well beyond the scope of this article to consider the wealth of academic writing on torture porn, but studies of the cycle remain prevalent as the trend continues. In addition to Lowenstein, see also for example Dean Lockwood (2009), Christopher Sharrett (2009), Jeremy Morris (2010) and Steve Jones (2010). Jones also has both an essay and a monograph on the cycle forthcoming (both 2013). A number of essays on other areas of genre cinema also make reference to the influence of torture porn (most notably its aesthetics) – see for example Craig Frost’s (2009) analysis of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, and Johnny Walker’s (2011) discussion of contemporary British horror cinema.

mainstream genre cinema (where, according to Edelstein, torture porn belongs), or to suggest that films lumbered with the description feature many connections other than their visual extremities. Critical failures such as *Captivity* (Joffé, 2007) and *The Tortured* (Lieberman, 2010) are difficult to place alongside controversial foreign fare like *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* (Six, 2009), *Srpski film/A Serbian Film* (Spasojevic, 2010), or the new French extreme cinema such as *Martyrs* (Laugier, 2008), *Frontières/Frontiers* (Gens, 2007) or *À l'intérieur/Inside* (Bustillo and Maury, 2007), and yet are often discussed almost interchangeably as part of a torture porn 'cycle', despite their varying themes.

The association of any contemporary genre film (and particularly American horror) with torture porn does risk the imposition of a particular allegorical reading of its themes. Edelstein's article aligned the trend with post-9/11 debates surrounding the ethics of torture, debates 'fuelled by horrifying pictures of manifestly decent men and women (some of them, anyway) enacting brutal scenarios of domination at Abu Ghraib' (Edelstein 2006). Metaphorical associations with 9/11, the subsequent War on Terror, and media circulated images of abused Abu Ghraib prisoners have been made by critics and academics in discussions of many of the films, especially *Hostel*.³⁸ Similar suggestions have been made of *I Spit on Your Grave*, most notably with reference to its torture imagery. Kevin J. Wetmore argues that 'all of the images in the film are lifted directly (if, perhaps presented more extremely) from Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. Naked men, suspension in chains, waterboarding, stress positions, beatings, chokings, all designed to humiliate and cause pain are present' (Wetmore 2012: 113). Furthermore, Wetmore suggests that in showing Jennifer's attacks as responses to her own assault, the torture is defensible: 'Torture, humiliation and terror are justified if one is using them in response to the same. Like the end of both *Hostel* films, it is acceptable for an American to do this to those who did this to Americans' (Wetmore 2012: 113). The interpretation of Andy's punishment as explicitly representing

³⁸ See Newman (2006), Church (2006), Mendik (2006) for examples.

waterboarding, and the men's restraints as holding them in stress positions, along with the observation that Hills's jeans and vest are 'clothing more suggestive of the military than suggestive of being suggestive' (Wetmore 2012: 112), clearly aligns Jennifer with the American forces and her rapists as camp prisoners. Yet this interpretation of meaning is problematic – in *I Spit on Your Grave* and potentially for rape revenge films more broadly – not least because it risks ignoring the important central issues of gender, sex and rape in the film. The suggestion that the film is concerned with allegories of American vengeance bypasses the obvious point that the men are also, in fact American (and that their 'otherness' is identified predominantly through their gender, rather than their geographical origins, as discussed earlier in this article). The tortures inflicted upon the men are highly personal punishments for their respective parts in Hills's assault; both series of attacks are difficult to see as metaphorical representations of terrorism or subsequent American retaliation.

The mirrored suffering of the rape and revenge sections of the narrative – the men torture Hills, Hills tortures them in symbolically equal ways – aims to validate both Jennifer's actions and her new-found, 'monstrous' personality; her rape and humiliation serving as retributivist justification for both the punishments she inflicts and her change in demeanour. As Jeremy Morris (2010) says of victims-turned-torturers in films, 'such role reversals are one technique that encourages the audience to "be on the side of" the torturer' (Morris 2010: 45). Justification for Hills's revenge is further strengthened through the use of 'equal-punishment retributivism' (Morris 2010: 46), in those inventive tortures that reflect Jennifer's own suffering.³⁹ It is worth noting here

³⁹ See Morris (2010) for a more in-depth discussion on philosophical theories of retributive justice and torture horror.

that, in keeping with the idea of 'suitable' reverse punishment, Jennifer, while obviously being responsible for their suffering and ultimately their inevitable deaths, does not actually 'kill' a single one of them. The men are left to bleed (Johnny, Stanley) or burn (Andy, in acid) to death, or their fates are put in each other's hands (Storch and Matthew). Hills is not present at the moment of any of their deaths, just as the audience is not made privy to their last breaths (again, aligning identification with her) – we hear the men scream, see them struggle and suffer, but then cut to see their lifeless faces, post-death. Jennifer leaves them for dead in much the same way as the men did her after she jumped from a bridge to escape them – and they intended her death just as she then sets up theirs.

Torture porn is perhaps best understood here at the most basic level through Lowenstein's spectacle horror model then – its most obvious and undeniable tropes being the visual presentation of suffering and explicit violence. While Jennifer's drawn out torment at the hands of her rapists is evident of these trends, the revenge half of *I Spit on Your Grave* certainly pushes them, with cleverly designed traps and restraints, painful and ultimately explicitly gory tests of physical endurance, and that eye-for-an-eye retributive logic that would not be out of place in a rurally set *Saw*. The association with a torture porn aesthetic is also apparent in the teaser poster – Jennifer brandishing her bloody shears, with the emphasis on her weapon, above the threatening tagline 'it's date night' (a line she actually turns on Johnny). In addition to its torture porn imagery, *I Spit on Your Grave* also employs other motifs from horror cinema more widely. From early in the film, the use of jump-shocks, POV shots of Jennifer stalked unknowingly through Stanley's camera, and an added intense score all aim to increase the suspense and to explicitly code the film as belonging to the contemporary horror genre. The shift towards a more 'obvious' horror formula in *I Spit on Your Grave* is somewhat similar to the remake of Wes Craven's 1972 rape-revenge film *The Last House on the*

Left (Iliadis, 2009) – which may have faced similar potential problems with its genre identification.

Conclusion

Ultimately then, while any potential feminist message in *I Spit on Your Grave* 2010 is arguably confused by the representation of its protagonist as a monster (albeit a sympathetic one), I would suggest that this is as a result of the need and deliberate attempt to position the film clearly within a particular contemporary genre context, and to market it as such. Furthermore, and despite the near demonizing of Jennifer, it could be maintained that Monroe's film not only interprets the perceived feminist agenda of Zarchi's original, but actively enhances this theme – Butler's Hills does not need to exploit her sexuality as a precursor to vengeance in the way in which Keaton's Jennifer does. While the plot does need to be understood within the context of *I Spit* as a remake, and thus takes the rape-revenge storyline and neatly maps it over Monroe's version, the film can be seen to comparatively progress elements of other, recent films with which it may be thematically grouped. The most obvious of these would be Dennis Iliadis's *The Last House on the Left* – a film that had its rape victim survive the ordeal (the character dies in Craven's version) just to have her passive during the second act, as her mother and father undertake vengeance on her behalf. This parental revenge for the rape (and murder, in these instances) of a child is seen elsewhere in films like *The Horseman* (Kastrissios, 2008), *Les 7 Jours du Talion/7 Days* (Grou, 2010) and *The Tortured*. Jennifer battles until the final frame just as the heroines of so-called 'survivalist' horrors *Haute Tension/Switchblade Romance* (Aja, 2003), *The Descent* (Marshall, 2005), or *Eden Lake* (Watkins, 2008), but unlike these women is neither recaptured (*Eden Lake*) nor revealed to be delusional (*Switchblade Romance*, *The Descent*) in a last minute twist. Here is a strong, smart and determined female protagonist who not only survives, but returns to avenge her own violations, and although there is no suggestion of a 'happy ending' for Hills after justice is supposedly served, she is seen in the final shot of the film having lost neither her mind nor her life, but instead calmly reflecting on her actions. To

appropriate the title of Marco Starr's 1984 defence of *I Spit on Your Grave*: J. Hills – version 2.0 – is alive.

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Appendix IIb: 'Evil Dead' (Review)

This review originally appeared on the website *Infinite Earths*, May 23 2013, <http://79.170.40.240/infiniteearth.co.uk/?p=476>, and is reproduced here as it was published.

Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981) is both a beloved classic of horror cinema and a shining example of the spirit of independent filmmaking. Produced on a budget of \$375,000, largely funded by Detroit doctors and businessmen whom Raimi, producer Robert Tapert and star Bruce Campbell convinced to invest, and filmed over a notoriously arduous four year shoot, *The Evil Dead* was a labour of love for Raimi and his cohorts – a film made by horror fans for horror fans. Full of intertextual references to the genre, a bizarre b-movie mix of light comedy with extreme gore and violence, and an experimental feel evident in the impressive camerawork, *The Evil Dead* was a truly original film which reflected the low budget, creative tendencies of the genre at the time.

The film found its true audience on video,[1] the arrival of the technology in the early Eighties enabling viewers access to marginal or underground films which they wouldn't ordinarily get to see, and in the UK at least its reputation was cemented by its place at the forefront of the video nasty furore (Mary Whitehouse labelled it "the number one nasty") and its subsequent banning. Two increasingly comic sequels (*Evil Dead II*, 1987 and *Army of Darkness*, 1992), an adored genre icon in Campbell's *Ash*, video games, multiple comic book series, and even an off-Broadway musical ensured a cult status and ever-growing devoted fanbase for the franchise.

Writer / Director Fede Alvarez has much to prove with *Evil Dead*, then – not only a remake of a classic cult horror film, but also his first full-length English language feature, and the first cautionary tale of five friends venturing to a remote cabin in the woods since, well, *The Cabin in the Woods*. Promotion for the film reverentially describes it as "a new vision from the producers of the horror classic", wisely asserting its individuality while simultaneously observing

the hallowed status of Raimi's original film and highlighting the involvement of Raimi, Tapert and Campbell, on board as producers and responsible for bringing in Alvarez. Early teaser trailers, eventually followed with a full-length, ultra gory redband version which showcased the films' impressive special effects, and a relentless marketing campaign ensured that anticipation for the remake's release ran high.

And rightly so. Alvarez delivers a frenetic, violent, blood-soaked 91 minutes which should both appease many fans of the franchise and appeal to the contemporary horror audience, managing to capture much of the spirit of the original film – albeit in a very modern way – while carving its own, slightly darker niche and eschewing a few trite genre clichés. *Evil Dead* does not send five friends to the middle of nowhere to drink, get high and fuck; instead it brings together protagonist Mia (Jane Levy), her semi-estranged brother David (Shiloh Fernandez), his girlfriend Natalie (Elizabeth Blackmore), and the siblings' friends Eric (Lou Taylor Pucci) and Olivia (Jessica Lucas), who hole up in an isolated childhood holiday home to help Mia overcome her drug addiction. The group finds a mysterious skin-bound book in a basement full of dead cats (which might, under normal circumstances, be reason for them to pack up their cars and head home) and inadvertently unleashes the evil that resides within it, a demonic force hell-bent on claiming five souls. Mia is undoubtedly, ultimately our Final Girl, but spends much of the middle act locked in the basement, suitably creepy as the first, and worst, possessed – an interesting decision which means her character is as much an equivalent of Cheryl (Ellen Sandweiss) as an attempted (and perhaps unwise) replacement of Ash. The 'cold-turkey' element provides a genuine reason for the group to not make a hasty exit once things start to turn sour and Mia's metaphorical demons become literalised – her behaviour and appearance can, for a while at least, be ascribed to her mental state and sickness as she weans herself free of addiction – but also adds a certain kinetic energy to an otherwise slow start, allowing the hysterical screams, panic and vomit to feature before all hell eventually breaks loose.

The ensuing carnage will both alienate audiences without a strong stomach, and thrill those hoping that the bloody trailer showed only a glimpse of what was to come. Much has been made of the remake's gory credentials – but, lest we forget, it is not remotely unprecedented. The 'body horror' of the early 1980s addressed fears of the body or a lack of control over it, and featured themes of corporeal transformation and degeneration, or violation by disease or foreign organisms (often read as allegorical manifestations of the rising fear of AIDS at the time). This is evident throughout Raimi's *The Evil Dead* in the impressive stop-motion special effects portraying the body in metamorphosis through demonic possession – most notably in the spectacularly executed final scenes of disintegration – skin melts, bodies collapse, chests burst and tear, and bones crumble to dust. Here, Alvarez's remake pushes the boundaries almost as far as is possible, through much-championed physical effects (and what the director claims is a complete lack of CGI, although given what is on display, that's often somewhat hard to believe). Skin is burned, sliced, punctured, slashed, and hacked off. Limbs are severed, bones are crushed, and blood is spewed, splashed and, in a tremendous final act, rained down. Little is left unseen, or takes place off-camera. This is a visceral, raw, and wince-inducing portrayal of the human body literally being taken to pieces – and the fact that much of the pain and suffering is entirely self-inflicted makes it just that little bit nastier. Linda Badley (1995: 7) argued that body horror, including Raimi's film, "became an agonistic 'body language' for a culture that perceived itself as grotesquely embodied and in transformation", representing a crisis of identity in the self and society. If we are to consider *Evil Dead* in an analogous way, then Mia and her friends represent less a crisis of transformation and more total self-destruction, a Millennial narcissism which is never more apparent than in the demonic 'Abomination Mia' who rises from the dirt to claim the soul of her human counterpart – whom she dismissively refers to as a "pathetic junkie".

Despite its overall 'unpleasantness', Alvarez's film does manage a slight sense of campy humour in places, at least echoing the tone of Raimi's film (itself not as funny as people seem to recall, its light physical comedy and

occasional near-one-liner no doubt retrospectively enhanced by its outré sequels). It is easy to see how the comic credentials of David building a DIY defibrillator, or lines like “why does my face hurt?” (from a character attacked by a nail gun) might be lost on an audience still reeling from the exclamation “your little sister’s being raped in hell”, or a murdered family pet. Yet for the most part there is a fine balance which means that the (admittedly very sparse) humour never undermines the characters’ suffering, and the script never resorts to the snide sarcasm one might expect from a supposed ‘comedy-horror’ in the wake of something like *Cabin in the Woods*. *Evil Dead* strives to largely play it straight, but includes enough comic nods to its roots for fans to spot. There are also knowing references in the camera work (including Raimi’s famed ‘shakey-cam’), Easter eggs in the form of the clock that hangs on the original’s cabin wall and the Oldsmobile Delta that features in nearly every film Raimi has a hand in, not to mention a couple of late cameos.

There is some weak characterisation – notably in the two women other than Mia – and it is a shame that Fernandez’s insipid David gets as much screen time as he does, but solid performances from both Pucci and Levy balance things out. Some awkward dialogue, especially in the early scenes, wears slightly as well. Yet both of these factors are largely forgivable and not entirely uncommon, either for the genre, or *Evil Dead*’s source. These are minor complaints for an otherwise excellent film which marks both a high point in recent horror, and, alongside last year’s outstanding *Maniac*, a new setting of the bar for horror remakes – original, creative and managing to strike a balance between knowing what to draw from a beloved original and what to develop or shun. *Evil Dead* might not be, as its poster claims, “the most terrifying film you will ever experience”, but it is brutal, relentless, and a lot of fun – exactly what fans of the original should have been hoping for.

[1] Indeed, comparing the \$26m the remake took at the US box office on its opening weekend to the \$6.1m (inflation adjusted) that Raimi’s film amassed in its entire theatrical run is entirely illogical, given not only *The Evil Dead*’s immense popularity on video, but also the fact that Raimi’s film screened in less than 150 cinemas, not the 3000 plus screens that featured Alvarez’s film.

Appendix IIb: *I Spit on Your Grave 2*: “Why bother?”

This editorial originally appeared on the website In Motion, May 8 2013, <http://cathpostgrad.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/i-spit-on-your-grave-2-why-bother/>, and is reproduced here as it was published.

It's rare that news of a remake or sequel going in to production surprises me, but the announcement that Anchor Bay and Cine Tel are set to release *I Spit on Your Grave 2* later this year came somewhat out of left field. The 2010 remake of Meir Zarchi's controversial 1978 rape-revenge film certainly has its fans (me included, *shameless plug*) and undoubtedly found its audience on DVD following some initial festival buzz and a limited theatrical release. Yet it had a pretty negative critical response and the wholly anticipated backlash from many fans of the exploitation original – which doesn't immediately leave the property screaming for serialisation. Initial comments on horror site Bloody Disgusting's report suggest a general response of “meh, why bother?”, echoing many reviews of Steven R. Monroe's remake which labelled it ‘worthless’, ‘unnecessary’, and as ‘pointless’ as “being in the Guinness Book of Records for eating a wheelbarrow of your own shit” (ironically, the comments on BD largely praise the remake itself).

I'm surprised anyone really has to ask “why bother?” I could discuss at length the merits of Monroe's film over Zarchi's, including its far less problematic portrayal of Hills' femme castratrice and its interpretation and enhancement of the supposed feminist message of the original. I could mention the superior acting (notably Sarah Butler as the film's victim/victor Jennifer Hills and the underrated Andrew Howard as vile Sheriff Storch), script and cinematography that many of those reviews that dismissed the remake also observed. I could even give some consideration to the suggestion that Anchor Bay are pushing: that they “had a great experience working with CineTel on the remake”, and that “fans and critics alike loved the film”. We could argue that all of this suggests scope for continuation or development. Yet the most obvious reason for any studio to produce any film is unquestionably to make money –

and the same audience who ask “why bother?” will dominate both the intended and eventual audience for this sequel.

Producing any form of remake, reboot, sequel or prequel ensures a profitable safety net in the shape of a guaranteed audience, familiar with an original film and curious to see how a new version or continuation turns out (or keen to critically tear it to shreds, in the case of some more zealous fans). If an adaptation offers something ‘new’, something previously unseen or an improvement of sorts, and can be marketed to an audience unfamiliar with the original – even better. In the case of genre cinema, and particularly horror, there’s usually an even wider loyal audience guaranteed to seek out new releases which fit their tastes, known title or not. Asking why this film is being made results in one resounding (and simple) answer: it’s a relatively cheap production with an assured market and the potential to draw in significant profit.

Perhaps a more interesting consideration is the decision to label this a sequel and title it *I Spit on Your Grave 2*. A brief plot synopsis doesn’t suggest the narrative continuation that ordinarily signifies a sequel (not that this is unheard of, for example take a look at *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*. Really, do. It’s a riot). Instead, while writer Jennifer is replaced with model Jessica, and the story takes place in the city (New York) not the country (at least until she’s “kidnapped to another country”, then all bets are off), the plot largely seems like a repeat of the 2010 film:

“...what starts out as an innocent and simple photo shoot soon turns into something disturbingly unthinkable! Raped, tortured and kidnapped to a foreign country, Jessica is buried alive and left to die. Against all odds, she manages to escape. Severely injured, she will have to tap into the darkest places of the human psyche to not only survive, but to exact her revenge...”

Curiously, it’s a somewhat similar strategy to the ‘unofficial sequel’ to Zarchi’s film, 1993’s *Savage Vengeance* – which featured Camille Keaton (who originally played Hills) as simply ‘Jennifer’ who, mentally recovering from an attack years earlier is again raped before exacting her revenge. Here, the potential for

continuing Hills' story, giving consideration to what happens after she dispatches the five rapists, how she comes to terms not only with her ordeal but the inevitable results of her own actions, and thus the possibility of furthering the slightly progressive message of the remake, is sidelined for more of the same. Rape, revenge, repeat. Furthermore, granted, it's a short synopsis which has to hold something back for the film's eventual release – but what seems like an emphasis on the “disturbingly unthinkable!": Jessica's rape, torture, severe injury, being buried alive, her dark psyche, over her escape and revenge, suggests a return to the exploitation roots of what both Cine Tel and Bloody Disgusting are now referring to as “the franchise”, in place of the more balanced approach I found in the 2010 film.

Speculation on the film's potential issues aside (I will, as always, reserve my judgement), we can conclude that this film is certainly not a sequel in the sense of continuing Jennifer's story. Rather, it is a sequel in so much as that is how its producers wish to label and sell it. One film and a remake do not a franchise make – and yet this pretty much entirely unrelated (name aside) film is being discussed as something that will help to “shape the franchise”. Perhaps this indicates an intention for further, future installments. Yet it seems more likely that calling this film *I Spit on Your Grave 2* and labeling it part of a series instead attracts an audience via the notoriety of both the 2010 film and Zarchi's before that. Rape and revenge are not uncommon cinematic themes, and rape-revenge cycles are apparent in exploitation, vigilante movies and contemporary horror alike. This film would find an audience. Yet not one as large as that provided by perhaps the most notorious rape-revenge film of all.

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Filmography

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13 Ghosts, 1960, dir. William Castle, USA
28 Days Later, 2002, dir. Danny Boyle, UK
2001 Maniacs, 2005, dir. Tim Sullivan, 2005, USA
The ABCs of Death, 2012, dirs. Kaare Andrews, Angela Bettis, H  l  ne Cattet,
Ernesto Diaz Espinoza, Jason Eisener, Bruno Forzani, Adri  n Garc  a
Bogliano, Xavier Gens, Lee Hardcastle, Noburo Iguchi, Thomas Cappelen
Malling, Jorge Michel Grau, Anders Morgenthaler, Yoshihiro Nishimura,
Bajong Pisanthanakun, Simon Rumley, Marcel Sarmiento, Jon Schnepf,
Srdjan Spasojevic, Timo Tjahjanto, Andrew Traucki, Nacho Vigalondo, Jake
West, Ti West, Ben Wheatley, Adam Wingard, Yudai Yamaguchi, USA/New
Zealand
Alien, 1979, dir. Ridley Scott, USA/UK
Alien 2, 1980, dir. James Cameron, Italy
Alien 3, 1992, dir. David Fincher, USA
All the Boys Love Mandy Lane, 2006, dir. Jonathan Levine, USA
The Amazing Spider-man, 2012, dir. Marc Webb, USA
An American Haunting, 2005, dir. Courtney Solomon,
UK/Canada/Romania/USA
The American Nightmare, 2000, dir. Adam Simon, USA/UK
American Psycho, 2000, dir. Mary Harron, USA
The Amityville Horror, 1979, dir. Stuart Rosenberg, USA
The Amityville Horror, 2005, dir. Andrew Douglas, USA
April Fool's Day, 1986, dir. Fred Walton, USA
April Fool's Day, 2008, dirs. Mitchell Altieri & Phil Flores, USA
Armageddon, 1998, dir. Michael Bay, USA
Avatar, 1999, dir. James Cameron, USA/UK
The Avengers, 2012, dir. Joss Whedon, USA
Bad Boys, 1995, dir. Michael Bay, USA
Batman Begins, 2005, dir. Christopher Nolan, USA/UK
The Birds, 1963, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA
Black Christmas, 1974, dir. Bob Clark, Canada
Black Christmas, 2006, dir. Glen Morgan, USA/Canada
Black Dynamite, 2009, dir. Scott Sanders, USA
Blackenstein, 1973, dir. William A. Levy, USA
Blacula, 1972, dir. William Crain, USA
Blade Runner, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott, USA/Hong Kong/UK
The Blair Witch Project, 1999, dirs. Eduardo S  nchez & Daniel Myrick, USA
Bloodsucking Freaks, 1976, dir. Joel M. Reed, USA
Body Snatchers, 1993, dir. Abel Ferrara, USA
Bonnie and Clyde, 1967, dir. Arthur Penn, USA
Boogeyman, 2005, dir. Steven T. Kay, USA/New Zealand/Germany

Breaking the Waves, 1996, dir. Lars Von Trier, Denmark/Sweden/France/Netherlands/Norway/Iceland/Spain
Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 1992, dir. Fran Rubel Kuzui, USA
The Burning, 1981, dir. Tony Maylam, USA/Canada
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920, dir. Robert Weine, Germany
The Cabin in the Woods, 2012, dir. Drew Goddard, USA
Cabin Fever, 2002, dir. Eli Roth, USA
Campfire Tales, 1991, dirs. William Cook & Paul Talbot, USA
Cannibal Ferox, 1981, dir. Umberto Lenzi, Italy
Captain America: The First Avenger, 2011, dir. Joe Johnston, USA
Captain Phillips, 2013, dir. Paul Greengrass, 2013, USA
Captivity, 2007, dir. Roland Joffé, USA/Russia
Carrie, 1976, dir. Brian De Palma, USA
Carrie, 2013, dir. Kimberly Peirce, USA
Chainsaw Redux: Making a Massacre, 2003, dir. Jefferey Schwarz, USA
Cherry Falls, 2000, dir. Geoffrey Wright, USA
Children of the Corn, 2009, dir. Donald P. Borchers, USA
Child's Play, 1988, dir. Tom Holland, USA
Clerks II, 2006, dir. Kevin Smith, USA
A Clockwork Orange, 1971, dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA
Cloverfield, 2008, dir. Matt Reeves, USA
Conan the Barbarian, 2011, dir. Marcus Nispel, USA
The Conjuring, 2013, dir. James Wan, USA
The Crazies, 1973, dir. George A. Romero, USA
The Crazies, 2010, dir. Breck Eisner, USA/United Arab Emirates
Cry_Wolf, 2005, dir. Jeff Wadlow, USA
The Dark Knight, 2008, dir. Christopher Nolan, USA/UK
The Dark Knight Rises, 2012, dir. Christopher Nolan, USA/UK
Darkness Falls, 2003, dir. Jonathan Liebesman, USA/Australia
Dark Water, 2005, dir. Walter Salles, USA
Date Movie, 2006, dir. Aaron Seltzer, USA/Switzerland
The Da Vinci Treasure, 2006, dir. Peter Mervis, USA
Dawn of the Dead, 1978, dir. George A. Romero, Italy/USA
Dawn of the Dead, 2004, dir. Zack Snyder, USA/Canada/Japan/France
Day of the Dead, 1985, dir. George A. Romero, USA
Day of the Dead, 2008, dir. Steve Miner, USA
The Day the Earth Stood Still, 1951, dir. Robert Wise, USA
The Descent, 2005, dir. Neil Marshall, UK
The Devil's Rejects, 2005, dir. Rob Zombie, USA/Germany
Diary of the Dead, 2007, dir. George A. Romero, USA
Dinocroc vs. Supergator, 2010, dir. Jim Wynorski, USA
Disaster Movie, 2008, dirs. Jason Friedberg & Aaron Seltzer, USA
Disturbia, 2007, dir. D.J. Caruso, USA
Don't Be Afraid of the Dark, 2010, dir. Troy Nixey, USA/Australia/Mexico
Dracula 3D, 2012, dir. Dario Argento, Italy/France/Spain
Dracula Untold, 2014, dir. Gary Shore, USA
Dr. Black, Mr Hyde, 1976, dir. William Crain, USA
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 1920, dir. John S. Robertson, USA

Easy Rider, 1969, dir. Dennis Hopper, USA
Eden Lake, 2008, dir. James Watkins, UK
The Evil Dead, 1981, dir. Sam Raimi, USA
Evil Dead, 2013, dir. Fede Alvarez, USA
Evil Head, 2012, dir. Doug Sakmann, USA
The Exorcist, 1973, dir. William Friedkin, USA
The Eye, 2008, dirs. David Moreau & Xavier Palud, USA/Canada
Fargo, 1996, dirs. Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, USA/UK
Fight Club, 1999, dir. David Fincher, USA/Germany
Final Destination, 2000, dir. James Wong, USA/Canada
The Final Destination, 2009, dir. David R. Ellis, USA
Final Destination 5, 2011, dir. Steven Quale, USA/Canada
Final Exam, 1981, dir. Jimmy Huston, USA
The Fly, 1958, dir. Kurt Neumann, USA
The Fly, 1986, dir. David Cronenberg, USA/UK/Canada
The Fog, 1980, dir. John Carpenter, USA
The Fog, 2005, dir. Rupert Wainwright, USA
Forgetting Sarah Marshall, 2008, dir. Nicholas Stoller, USA
Frankenstein, 2004, dir. Marcus Nispel, USA
Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare, 1991, dir. Rachel Talalay, USA
Freddy vs Jason, 2003, dir. Ronny Yu, Canada/USA/Italy
Friday the 13th, 1980, dir. Sean S. Cunningham, USA
Friday the 13th, 2009, dir. Marcus Nispel, USA
Friday the 13th Part 2, 1981, dir. Steve Miner, USA
Friday the 13th Part III, 1982, dir. Steve Miner, USA
Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood, 1988, dir. John Carl Buechler, USA
Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan, 1989, dir. Rob Hedden, USA/Canada
Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter, 1984, dir. Joseph Zito, USA
Friday the 13th: A New Beginning, 1985, dir. Danny Steinmann, USA
Fright Night, 1985, dir. Tom Holland, USA
Fright Night, 2011, dir. Craig Gillespie, USA
Frontier(s)/Frontière(s), 2007, dir. Xavier Gens, France/Switzerland
Full Metal Jacket, 1987, dir. Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA
Funny Games, 1997, dir. Michael Haneke, Austria
Funny Games, 2007, dir. Michael Haneke, USA/France/UK/Austria/Germany/Italy
Get Carter, 1971, dir. Mike Hodges, UK
Get Carter, 2000, dir. Stephen Kay, USA
Get Him to the Greek, 2010, dir. Nicholas Stoller, USA
The Godfather Part II, 1974, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, USA
Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 2009, dir. Unknown, USA
The Golem, 1915, dirs. Henrik Galeen & Paul Wegener, Germany
The Golem, 1920, dirs. Carl Boese & Paul Wegener, Germany
The Golem and the Dancing Girl, 1917, dirs. Rochus Gliese & Paul Wegener, Germany
The Gore Gore Girls, 1973, dir. Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA

Graduation Day, 1981, dir. Herb Freed, USA
Gravity, 2013, dir. Alfonso Cuarón, USA/UK
The Green Berets, 1968, dirs. Ray Kellogg, John Wayne & Mervyn LeRoy, USA
Grindhouse, 2007, dirs. Quentin Tarantino & Robert Rodriguez, USA
Grizzly, 1976, dir. William Girdler, USA
The Grudge, 2004, dir. Takeshi Shimizu, USA/Japan
Halloween, 1978, dir. John Carpenter, USA
Halloween, 2007, dir. Rob Zombie, USA
Halloween II, 2009, dir. Rob Zombie, USA
Halloween H20, 1998, dir. Steve Miner, USA
Halloween: Resurrection, 2002, dir. Rick Rosenthal, USA
Hannibal Rising, 2007, dir. Peter Webber, UK/Czech Republic/France/Italy
Happy Birthday to Me, 1981, dir. J. Lee Thompson), Canada
Hatchet, 2006, dir. Adam Green, USA
Hatchet II, 2010, dir. Adam Green, 2010, USA
Hatchet III, 2013, dir. BJ McDonnell, USA
The Haunted World of El Superbeasto, 2009, dir. Rob Zombie, USA
The Haunting, 1963, dir. Robert Wise, UK/USA
The Haunting, 1999, dir. Jan De Bont, USA
Haute Tension/High Tension/Switchblade Romance, 2005, dir. Alexandre Aja, France, Italy, Romania
Hell Night, 1981, dir. Tom De Simone, USA
Hellraiser, 1987, dir. Clive Barker, UK
The Hills Have Eyes, 1977, dir. Wes Craven, USA
The Hills Have Eyes, 2006, dir. Alexandre Aja, USA/France
The Hills Have Eyes II, 1984, dir. Wes Craven, UK/USA
The Hills Have Eyes II, 2007, dir. Martin Weisz, USA
The Hitcher, 1986, dir. Robert Harmon, USA
The Hitcher, 2007, dir. Dave Meyers, USA
Hobo With a Shotgun, 2007, dir. Jason Eisener, Canada
Honogurai mizu no soko kara/Dark Water, 2002, dir. Hideo Nakata, Japan
The Horseman, 2008, dir. Steven Kastrissios, Australia
Hostel, 2005, dir. Eli Roth, USA
Hostel II, 2007, dir. Eli Roth, USA
Hostel: Part III, 2011, dir. Scott Spiegel, USA
House of 1000 Corpses, 2000, dir. Rob Zombie, USA
The House of the Devil, 2009, dir. Ti West, USA
House of Wax, 1953, André de Toth, USA
House of Wax, 2005, dir. Jaume Collet-Serra, Australia/USA
House on Haunted Hill, 1959, dir. William Castle, USA
House on Haunted Hill, 1999, dir. William Malone, USA
The House on Sorority Row, 1983, dir. Mark Rosman, USA
The House That Freddy Built, 2006, dir. Jefferey Schwarz, USA
The Human Centipede (First Sequence), 2009, dir. Tom Six, Netherlands
I Am Legend, 2007, dir. Francis Lawrence, USA
I Drink Your Blood, 1970, dir. David Durston, USA
I, Frankenstein, 2014, dir. Stuart Beattie, USA/Australia
I Know What You Did Last Summer, 1997, dir. Jim Gillespie, USA

I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer, 2006, dir. Sylvain White, USA
The Incredible Hulk, 2008, dir. Louis Leterrier, USA
Inside/À l'intérieur, 2007, dirs. Julien Maury & Alexandre Bustillo, French
Insidious, 2010, dir. James Wan, USA/Canada
Insidious Chapter 2, 2013, dir. James Wan, USA/Canada
Into The Mirror, 2003, dir. Sung-ho Kim, South Korea
The Invasion, 2007, dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel, USA/Australia
Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 1956, dir. Don Siegel, USA
Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 1978, dir. Philip Kaufman, USA
Iron Man, 2008, dir. Jon Favreau, USA
Iron Man 2, 2010, dir. Jon Favreau, USA
I Spit on Your Grave, 1978, dir. Meir Zarchi, USA
I Spit on Your Grave, 2010, dir. Steven R. Monroe, USA
I Still Know What You Did Last Summer, 1998, dir. Danny Cannon, USA
It, 1990, dir. Tommy Lee Wallace, USA/Canada
The Italian Job, 1969, dir. Peter Collinson, UK
The Italian Job, 2003, dir. F. Gary Gray, USA/France/UK
Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday, 1993, dir. Adam Marcus, USA
Jason Lives: Friday the 13th Part VI, 1986, dir. Tom McLoughlin, USA
Jason X, 2001, dir. James Isaac, USA
Jaws, 1975, dir. Steven Spielberg, USA
Ju-On: The Grudge, 2003, dir. Takeshi Shimizu, Japan
Kick-Ass, 2010, dir. Matthew Vaughn, UK/USA
Knocked Up, 2007, dir. Judd Apatow, USA
Lady Vengeance, 2005, dir. Chan-wook Park, South Korea
Land of the Dead, 2005, dir. George A. Romero, Canada/France/USA
The Last Exorcism, 2010, dir. Daniel Stamm, USA
The Last House on the Left, 1972, dir. Wes Craven, USA
The Last House on the Left, 2009, dir. Denis Iliadis, USA
Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III, 1990, dir. Jeff Burr, USA
Let Me In, 2010, dir. Matt Reeves, UK/USA
The Lords of Salem, 2012, dir. Rob Zombie, USA/UK/Canada
The Lost Boys, 1987, dir. Joel Schumacher, USA
Machete, 2010, dir. Ethan Maniquis/Robert Rodriguez, USA
Maniac, 1980, dir. William Lustig, USA
Maniac, 2012, dir. Franck Khalfoun, France/USA
The Man with the Golden Gun, 1974, dir. Guy Hamilton, UK
Martin, 1977, dir. George A. Romero, USA
Martyrs, 2008, dir. Pascal Laugier, France/Canada
The Matrix, 1999, dirs. Andy Wachowski & Lana Wachowski, USA/Australia
May, 2002, dir. Lucky McKee, USA
Mega Python vs. Gatoroid, 2011, dir. Mary Lambert, USA
Megashark vs. Crocosaurus, 2010, dir. Christopher Douglas-Olen Ray, USA
Megashark vs. Giant Octopus, 2009, dir. Ace Hannah, USA
The Messengers, 2007, dirs. Danny Pang & Oxide Pang, USA
Mirrors, 2008, dir. Alexandre Aja, USA/Romania/Germany/Spain/France
Mother's Day, 1980, dir. Charles Kaufman, USA
Mother's Day, 2010, dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, USA

The Mummy, 1999, dir. Stephen Sommers, USA
My Bloody Valentine, 2001, dir. George Mihalka, Canada
My Bloody Valentine, 2009, dir. Patrick Lussier, USA
Near Dark, 1987, dir. Kathryn Bigelow, USA
Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy, 2010, dirs. Daniel Farrands & Andrew Kasch, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street, 1984, dir. Wes Craven, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street, 2010, dir. Samuel Bayer, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge, 1985, dir. Jack Sholder, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors, 1987, dir. Chuck Russell, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master, 1988, dir. Renny Harlin, USA
A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Dream Child, 1989, dir. Stephen Hopkins, USA
Night of the Living Dead, 1968, dir. George A. Romero, USA
Night of the Living Dead, 1990, dir. Tom Savini, USA
Night of the Living Dead, 2006, dir. Jeff Broadstreet, USA
Nosferatu, 1922, dir. F.W. Murnau, Germany
Oldboy, 2003, dir. Park Chan-wook, South Korea
Oldboy, 2013, dir. Spike Lee USA
The Omen, 1976, dir. Richard Donner, USA/UK
The Omen, 2006, dir. John Moore, USA
Orca, 1977, dir. Michael Anderson, USA
The Others, 2001, dir. Alejandro Amenábar, USA/Spain/France/Italy
Pain and Gain, 2013, dir. Michael Bay, USA
Paranormal Activity, 2007, dir. Oren Peli, USA
Paranormal Activity 3, 2011, dirs. Henry Joost & Ariel Schulman, USA
Paranormal Entity, 2009, dir. Shane van Dyke, USA
Pearl Harbour, 2001, dir. Michael Bay, USA
Peeping Tom, 1960, dir. Michael Powell, UK
Pet Semetary, 1989, dir. Mary Lambert, USA
Piranha, 1978, dir. Joe Dante, USA
Piranha 3D, 2010, dir. Alexandre Aja, USA
Piranha 3DD, 2012, dir. John Gulager, USA
Planet Terror, 2007, dir. Robert Rodriguez, USA
Poltergeist, 1982, dir. Tobe Hooper, USA
Porn of the Dead, 2006, dir. Rob Rotten, USA
Prometheus, 2012, dir. Ridley Scott, UK/USA
Prom Night, 1980, dir. Paul Lynch, Canada
Prom Night, 2008, dir. Nelson McCormick, USA/Canada
Psycho, 1960, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA
Psycho, 1998, dir. Gus Van Sant, USA
The Purge, 2013, dir. James DeMonaco, USA/France
Puss In Boots, 2011, dir. Chris Miller, USA
Quarantine, 2008, dir. John Erick Dowdle, USA
Rabid, 1977, dir. David Cronenberg, Canada
Rear Window, 1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, USA
[REC], 2007, dirs. Jaume Balagueró & Paco Plaza, Spain
Re-Imagining Halloween, 2007, dir. unknown, USA

Resident Evil, 2002, dir. Paul W.S. Anderson, UK/Germany/France/USA
The Ring, 2002, dir. Gore Verbinski, USA/Japan
Ringu/Ring, 1998, dir. Hideo Nakata, Japan
Robocop, 1987, dir. Paul Verhoeven, USA
Robocop, 2014, dir. José Padilha, USA
Rosemary's Baby, 1968, dir. Roman Polanski, USA
Saturday Night Fever, 1977, dir. John Badham, USA
Saw, 2004, dir. James Wan, USA/Australia
Saw II, 2005, dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, USA/Canada
Saw 3D, 2010, dir. Kevin Greutert, Canada/USA
Scary Movie, 2000, dir. Keenen Ivory Wayans, USA
Scream, 1996, dir. Wes Craven, USA
Scream 2, 1997, dir. Wes Craven, USA
Scream 3, 2000, dir. Wes Craven, USA
Scream 4, 2011, dir. Wes Craven, USA
Scream Blacula Scream, 1973, dir. Bob Kelljan, USA
See No Evil, 2006, dir. Gregory Dark, USA
See No Evil 2, 2014, dirs. Jen Soska & Sylvia Soska, USA
Shark Night, 2011, dir. David R. Ellis, USA
Shrek, 2001, dirs. Andrew Adamson & Vicky Jensen, USA
Shaun of the Dead, 2004, dir. Edgar Wright, UK/France/USA
Shutter, 2004, dirs. Banjong Pisanthanakun & Parkpoom Wongpoom, Thailand
Shutter, 2004, dir. Masayuki Ochiai, USA
The Silence of the Lambs, 1991, dir. Jonathan Demme, USA
Silent Hill, 2006, dir. Cristophe Gans, Canada/France/Japan/USA
Silent Night, Deadly Night, 1984, dir. Charles E. Sellier Jr., USA
Silent Night, 2012, dir. Steven C. Miller, Canada/USA
Sinister, 2012, dir. Scott Derrickson, USA/UK
Sisters, 1973, dir. Brian De Palma, USA
Sisters, 2006, dir. Douglas Buck, USA/Canada/UK
The Sixth Sense, 1999, dir. M. Night Shyamalan, USA
The Slumber Party Massacre, 1982, dir. Amy Holden Jones, USA
Sorority Row, 2009, dir. Stewart Hendler, USA
Southern Comfort, 1981, dir. Walter Hill, USA/Switzerland/UK
Spider-man 3, 2007, dir. Sam Raimi, USA
Srpski film/A Serbian Film, 2010, dir. Srdjan Spasojevic, Serbia
The Stand, 1994, dir. Mick Garris, USA
Star Trek, 2009, dir. J.J. Abrams, USA/Germany
Star Trek Into Darkness, 2013, dir. J.J. Abrams, USA
Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope, 1977, dir. George Lucas, USA
The Stepfather, 1987, dir. Joseph Ruben, UK/Canada
The Stepfather, 2009, dir. Nelson McCormick, USA
The Stepford Wives, 1975, dir. Brian Forbes, USA
The Stepford Wives, 2004, dir. Frank Oz, USA
Straw Dogs, 1971, dir. Sam Peckinpah, USA/UK
Straw Dogs, 2011, Rod Lurie, USA
The Student of Prague, 1913, dirs. Stellan Rye & Paul Wegener, Germany
The Student of Prague, 1926, dir. Henrik Galeen, Germany

The Student of Prague, 1935, dir. Arthur Robison, Germany
The Student of Prague, 2004, dirs. Spencer Collins & Ian McAlpin, Czech Republic/USA
Survival of the Dead, 2009, dir. George A. Romero, USA/Canada
Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, 2002, dir. Chan-wook Park, South Korea
A Tale of Two Sisters, 2003, dir. Kim Jee-woon, South Korea
Texas Chainsaw 3D, 2013, dir. John Luessenhop, USA
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, 1974, dir. Tobe Hooper, USA
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, 2003, dir. Marcus Nispel, USA
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2, 1986, dir. Tobe Hooper, USA
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning, 2006, dir. Jonathan Liebesman, USA
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation, 1994, dir. Kim Henkel, USA
Texas Chain Saw Massacre: The Shocking Truth, 2000, dir. David Gregory, USA
Texas Vibrator Massacre, 2008, dir. Rob Rotten, USA
The Thing, 1982, dir. John Carpenter, USA
The Thing, 2011, dir. Matthijs van Heijningen, USA/Canada
The Thing Evolves, 2012, dir. unknown, USA
The Thing from Another World, 1951, dir. Christian Nyby, USA
Thir13en Ghosts, 2001, dir. Steve Beck, USA/Canada
This Is 40, 2012, dir. Judd Apatow, USA
Thor, 2011, dir. Kenneth Branagh, USA
The Toolbox Murders, 1978, dir. Dennis Donnelly, USA
Toolbox Murders, 2003, dir. Tobe Hooper, USA
The Tortured, 2010, dir. Robert Lieberman, USA/Canada
Total Recall, 1990, dir. Paul Verhoeven, USA
Total Recall, 2012, dir. Len Wiseman, USA/Canada
To The Devil A Daughter, 1976, dir. Peter Sykes, UK/West Germany
Transmorphers, 2007, dir. Leigh Scott, USA
Trick 'r' Treat, 2007, dir. Michael Dougherty, USA
Two Thousand Maniacs!, 1964, dir. Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA
Tucker & Dale vs. Evil, 2010, dir. Eli Craig, Canada/USA
The Uninvited, 2009, dirs. Charles Guard & Thomas Guard, USA/Canada/Germany
Urban Legend, 1998, dir. Jamie Blanks, USA/France
Urban Legends: Bloody Mary, 2005, dir. Mary Lambert, USA
Urban Legends: Final Cut, 2000, dir. John Ottman, USA
Valentine, 2001, dir. Jamie Blanks, USA
Van Helsing, 2004, dir. Stephen Sommers, USA/Czech Republic
V/H/S, 2012, dirs. Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, David Bruckner, Tyler Gillett, Justin Martinez, Glenn McQuaid, Radio Silence, Joe Swanberg, Chad Villella, Ti West, Adam Wingard, USA
V/H/S/2, 2013, dirs. Simon Barrett, Jason Eisener, Gareth Evans, Gregg Hale, Eduardo Sánchez, Timo Tjahjanto, Adam Wingard, USA/Canada/Indonesia
Videodrome, 1982, dir. David Cronenberg, Canada
The Virgin Spring, 1960, dir. Ingmar Bergman, Sweden

Wes Craven's New Nightmare, 1994, dir. Wes Craven, USA
What Lies Beneath, 2000, dir. Robert Zemeckis, USA
When A Stranger Calls, 1979, dir. Fred Walton, USA
When A Stranger Calls, 2006, dir. Simon West, USA
White Zombie, 1932, dir. Victor Halperin, USA
The Wicker Man, 1973, dir. Robin Hardy, UK
The Wicker Man, 2006, dir. Neil LaBute, USA/Germany/Canada
The Wild Bunch, 1969, dir. Sam Peckinpah, USA
Willard, 1971, dir. Daniel Mann, USA
Willard, 2003, dir. Glen Morgan, Canada/USA
The Wizard of Gore, 1970, dir. Herschell Gordon Lewis, USA
The Wizard of Gore, 2007, dir. Jeremy Kasten, USA
Wolf Creek, 2005, dir. Greg Mclean, Australia
The Wolf Man, 1941, dir. George Waggner, USA
The Wolfman, 2012, dir. Joe Johnston, USA
Wrong Turn, 2003, dir. Rob Schmidt, USA/Germany
Xanadu, 1980, dir. Robert Greenwald, USA
The XXXorcist, 2006, dir. Doug Sakmann, USA
You're Next, 2011, dir. Adam Wingard, USA
Zombi 2, 1979, dir. Lucio Fulci, Italy
Zombieland, 2009, dir. Ruben Fleischer, USA